

Short Summary of TP June Month of Action at AWE Burghfield

Written by Angie Zelter, 7th July 2016

In May various press releases went out far and wide to alert press to the month of actions. Police Liaisons from Thames Valley Police contacted various people organising specific days and were assured that all would be peaceful and our usual guidelines of allowing access to fire and ambulances still held.

Wednesday 1st June to Sunday 5th June – police were out in force around AWE Burghfield. Heras fencing up on both sides of the MoD road called The Mearings to stop protesters from entering this MoD road that leads to the main gate via fields. There was a large police presence at Construction Gate and at the North end of The Mearings where passes were now being demanded in order to enter The Mearings.

Around 60 Trident Ploughshares activists gathered in Reading for workshops and a Seize the Day gig.

Monday 6th June – Trident Ploughshares Day - what we called our Day 1 – around 10.30 and 11 a.m. three groups of people descended on AWE Burghfield. Around 15 people went to the North End of The Mearings and put up 11 red umbrellas which said STOP TRIDENT and stood in the MoD road entrance.

Occasionally they were asked to move by police which they did but then re-instated their gentle symbolic blockade. A presence was held at this place most of the day. 'Nukes of Hazard' placards were attached to various posts on the approach roads to AWE Burghfield to indicate the route that the nuclear convoys take to Scotland.



At the same time 2 groups, with around 15 people in each group, went via different routes to Burnthouse Lane, either side of the Construction Gate and out of sight of it (the police were gathered right by the gate). The 2 groups set up 2 effective blockades with arm tubes. Supporters protected them from the hot sun with umbrellas and materials.

Most people at the 3 places were dressed in red paper suits to indicate a red line and make the link between climate change and the military abuse of carbon resources which is leading to runaway climate chaos.



As the press release of the day stated, 'With our red clothing and long red line of fabric we were making the connection to climate change as another critical threat to our future that is largely ignored by the state. It's that intransigence and blindness that makes it imperative that people take back control.'

After a few hours the 2 blockading groups managed to come together and left the public highway to set up a joint blockade at the Construction Gates themselves. This was on the MoD land/roadway, right in front of the gates, making it impossible for the gates to open and let in any construction traffic. This left the public highway free as it was our intention to block the illegal and criminal work of nuclear warhead construction not the free passageway of local people.

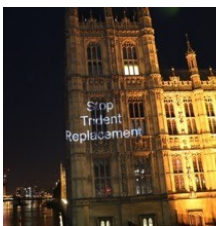


The day went well and it was decided by consensus that as we now had 'control' of the gates we should stay as long as possible and 'hold' the space. Therefore around 20 of us set up camp with pop-up tents and tarpaulins at the gate itself and stayed the night.

The other activists went away to make further plans for the next day. During the night some of the activists stencilled 'STOP TRIDENT' in white and yellow paint on the tarmac of the entrance into the gates.



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As we were lying asleep outside the gates, Feral X, projected our main messages "Trident is a war crime" and "Stop Trident Replacement" on to the Ministry of Defence and Houses of Parliament.



Various videos of the first day can be found at <http://tridentploughshares.org/pics-videos/>

Tuesday 7th June – Scottish Day – Day 2 - Scottish folk brought a green monster – Nessie, from Loch Lomond - which paraded around the Construction Gates with Scots in kilts and playing bag-pipes calling for the demise of Trident. Their message was that Nessie was a good monster, it was Trident that was the evil monster in the Loch.

At around 7.30 a.m. activists in a car drew right up to the entrance to the north end of The Mearings and managed to manoeuvre the car to block the The Mearings (a MoD road).

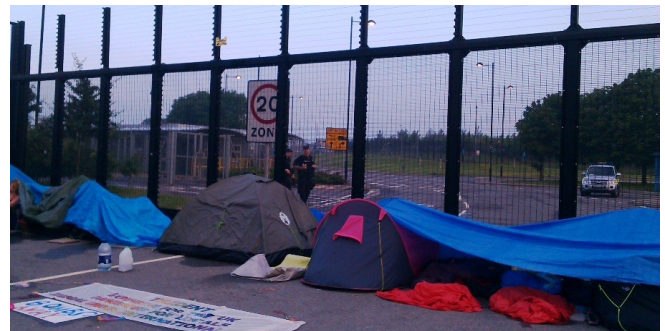


The 2 people in the front seat got into lock-ons inside the car while the 2 passengers jumped out with their tube lock-ons and blocked the road behind the car completely stopping all vehicular traffic for over 2 hours.



It took some hours before the MoD 'cutting team' safely cut them out at around 11.30a.m. whereupon they were arrested and taken to Newbury police station for 9 hours, and charged with highway obstruction. The car was then hauled away and impounded. Helen (from Norfolk) went to court in Reading on Monday 27th June, put in a not guilty plea and was told to return on 18th July. The 3 Finnish activists, arrested with her (Kristiina, Esa and Pipsa) had decided not to waste their money coming back for this preliminary hearing and arrest warrants were made out for them.

The 2nd night at Construction Gate saw tarpaulins going up over the tents as rain started to fall on the 20 or so protesters still camping out at the gate. Spirits were high as the blockade held for another night.



Wednesday 8th June – International Day – Day 3 – anti-militarists from the European mainland gathered at the Construction Gates for discussions about the rise of militarism, the ongoing wars against 'terrorism' and for resource extraction, and its impact on our societies.



They continued the blockade at the Construction Gates, along with other activists still present from the first 2 days of protest. More 'Nukes of Hazard' placards were attached to various posts on the approach roads to AWE Burghfield along Burnthouse Lane.

6 large images (Peter Kennard photo-montages) attached as billboard posters to 4'x4' plywood panels were used as a visual and some of the activists explained to the media why they were there.

See <http://tridentploughshares.org/video-a-chat-with-blockaders-at-awe-burghfield-june-2016-protests/>



The boards were then attached by bicycle locks to posts either side of the Gates as a visual reminder of what we are here for – to resist Trident Replacement.

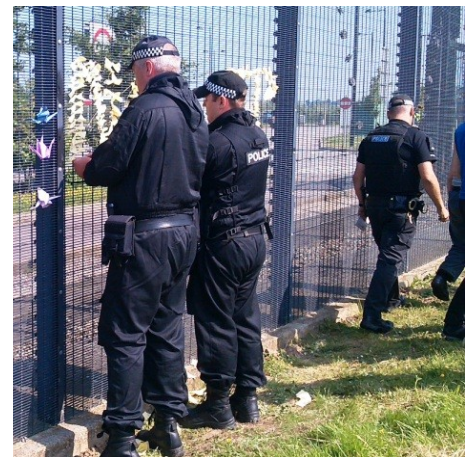
Some protesters visited the North end of The Mearings with placards and banners and tried to engage Burghfield workers in conversations. Workers stream in early in the morning and out again late afternoon, leaving their vehicles at home and having to walk through the check-point that has been moved to the North End of The Mearings because of our actions. They try not to engage with us but cannot fail to see the diversity of opposition to Trident.

Throughout the day protesters practised getting in their lock-ons in case of a swoop by police.



Another night was spent at the Construction Gates camping out with some people staying on from the previous days. They were joined later in the evening with a van load from Yorkshire getting ready for the next day.

Thursday 9th June – Yorkshire Day – Day 4 - the Yorkshire group protested visually and vocally at the north end of The Mearings with their banners and leaflets. They put up banners and cranes and the police removed them.



They also spent much time supporting the Construction Gates blockade. Ex Leeds MEP Michael McGowan was present in solidarity with the protests.



Most of our internationals had to leave this day. Sad farewells were made to our Belgian, German and Finnish friends with grateful thanks for their solidarity. Yet another night was held at the gates though the MoD police began to get more intrusive during the night as our numbers dwindled.

Friday 10th June – Day 5 – an extremely hot day resulted in the 2 French women and Rowland deciding they needed to strip off and cool down. And what better excuse did they have than making the link between Bikini Island, the disaster of the nuclear bomb tests and the Marshall Island case against all 9 nuclear weapons states currently being held at the International Court of Justice. The topless women and bikini clad man probably got more cheers from passers-by than our other actions had.



Later in the evening we were joined by 2 women (Juliet and Kay) from the Aldermaston Womens Peace Camp. It was their monthly weekend of protest at Aldermaston but, in solidarity with our protests, they joined with us, staying the night. Much fun was had when the camper van joined with Rowland's and Russells's vans at the gates. A fire was lit and food and stories shared.

Saturday 11th June – Day 6 – several people including the Aldermaston women put up more banners on the fences and were told to take them down as this was a bye-law offence. It was hilarious when the Aldermaston women quoted from the High Court case, that they had won some years previously, that agreed with their right to put up banners as part of lawful protest. The MoD insisted that we were defacing the fences and took names and addresses of around 5 women who refused to take down their banners and which the MoD seized under the pretext of summoning them to a future court case under the byelaws. We expect to win these cases if they ever take place. The MoD have a habit of intimidating people from lawful protest, threatening cases under the byelaws and then not going ahead with them. We shall see.



We enjoyed ourselves at the gates but later when the MoD harrassed people about not sleeping at the gates, as this would be interpreted as 'camping on MoD land' which was prohibited under the byelaws, some of us set up a peace camp on the grass and track opposite the gates, where we could cook on a fire and find protection from sun and rain whilst vehicles and some people stayed at the gates keeping watch.

Sunday 12th June – Day 7 – most of the remaining people moved over to the peace camp. We continued poking fun at the 'no closing your eyes as we will interpret that as sleeping' demand from police by stuffing a red paper suit with old clothes.



Keith, from Bristol, kept him company after making him and at night we became used to leaving the Red Man as our guard, sleeping in a chair with a hat over his head so the police could not see if his eyes were open or not!



Monday 13th June – Day 8 – As our numbers got less and it became more and more embarrassing for the MoD that we were, nevertheless, not giving up and were still there protesting, the MoD asked us to remove all the lock-ons still at the gate saying this was a safety issue and in case of emergencies the gate had to be able to be opened – we were not sure why this was only an issue after 8 days! They asked who owned them and Angie claimed responsibility for them as no one else was in a position to do this. She was asked to remove them and after refusing to do so all our lock-ons were taken by MoD PC Holt No.4347 at 3.55p.m. and she was reported to be summonsed for bye-law offences.

Tuesday 14th June – Southern Region Day – Day 9 – groups from Oxford, Faringdon, Reading, Salisbury, Southampton and Abingdon gathered at the North end of The Mearings with banners. Some dressed in white hazard suits delineating the crime scene of Trident. Another dressed as a domestic extremist.



Meanwhile, others supporting the ongoing blockade at Construction gate shared tea and cake in



celebration of a birthday. As people local to the area it was well informed and passionate.

Around 7 protesters stayed overnight, to vigil and sleep in turns.



Wednesday 15th June – Welsh Day – Day 10 – at 9.15a.m. a 40 foot model Trident submarine made

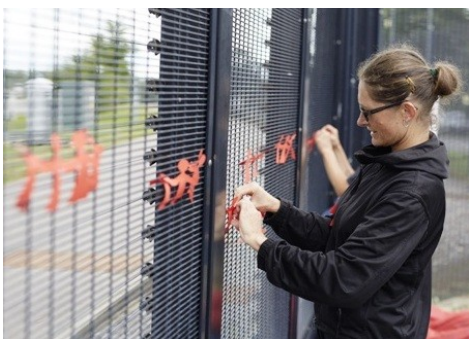
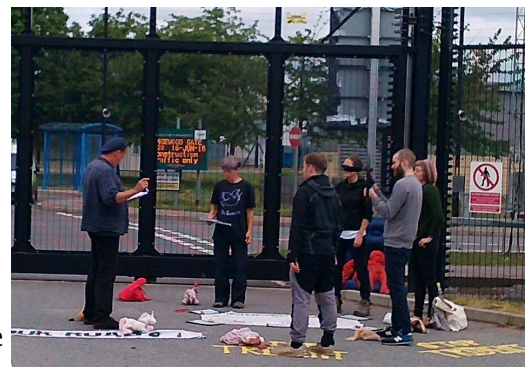
out of 5 panels of plywood, with bicycle locks attached to panels and people, was placed against the Construction Gates. Protesters from Knighton, Builth Wells, Presteigne and Llandrindod dressed in radiation hazard suits and masks. The MoD police dismantled and removed it a couple of hours later when the protesters refused to remove it, saying that it was the responsibility of the MoD to disarm Trident. All but one of the people unlocked themselves. Angie refused and was then asked for her details (instead of arrest) and told she would be summonsed to court on 2 byelaw charges – refusing to move both the submarine panel and the lock-ons that had been taken by the police on the 13th.



Other Welsh groups (from Blackwood, Caerphilly, Newport, Swansea, West Wales) were at the North end of The Mearings along with the singers from Côt Cochion and Côt Gobaith who treated workers and police to moving and passionate songs of resistance, peace and justice in Welsh and English.

That night we had 5 tents and 3 vehicles at the camp.

Thursday 16th June – Academics Day - Day 11 – 6 academics went to the North End of The Mearings to interview the workers and ask what they felt about their work and the protests – few engaged with the survey. The academics then returned to the Construction Gates to hold a seminar where they presented papers and exchanged research findings. The Thames Valley Police Liaison listened in finding it most interesting.



While the academics held their seminar the camp was taken down and several local people helped take the tents, tarps and cooking equipment to store for another time.

The camp site was left cleaner than when we found it. After clearing up the remaining protesters left for home. Most had spent between 1 and 6 days at the blockade, Angie had spent 11 days there. It was sad to break the camp but no-one was able to commit to holding the space safely and responsibly.

Friday 17th June – Day 12 – our local supporters said the gate was left shut – we think that all construction contractors and workers were told to take the month off rather than risk

delays and problems. It appears that only the safety and emergency workers with high security clearance were walking into the base through The Mearings.

Saturday 18th June – Day 13 – Construction gate remained closed as is usual on weekends anyway.

Sunday 19th June – Day 14 – 5 women arrived at 9p.m. and set up camp at the Construction Gate in the rain, getting ready for the next day.

Monday 20th June – Women's Day & London Day – Day 15 – around 15 women gathered, nattered and protested at the Construction Gate. Women who had been at Greenham met once more, saddened at still having to protest against weapons of mass destruction.



A knitted woollen banner that had been used a few years ago in the 7 mile roll-out of knitted peace blankets hung between Aldermaston and Burghfield was held out – in the 3 years since it was first used the cost of Trident had now risen to 205 billion pounds.

Meanwhile, at the North end of The Mearings a Mad Hatters Tea Party was chaotically emerging with people from London transformed into March Hares, Red Queens and playing cards and eventually sitting down to tea. Banners read 'Mad to spend 205 billion on Trident', 'Mutually Assured Destruction', and 'We are mad hatters, they are mad bombers'. 3 Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhists drummed for peace with them.



Sylvia stayed on overnight with Sophia when Sue, Liz, Angie and other women departed from the Construction Gates.

Tuesday 21st June – Day 16 – 2 women from Settle Quakers came to join the protest, making 4 for the day. They made paper cranes and other decorations on wooden structures to decorate the tarmac before the gates where they continued the blockade. Sylvia and Sophia continued the blockade for yet another overnight stay by camping outside the Construction Gates again. Although harassed by MoD who threatened to confiscate their sleeping bags if they fell asleep, nevertheless they stayed put. At one point they were made to move their tent to the outer limit of MoD land in the gateway and immediately within the highway - by the double white lines. This was a dangerous place to stay so they slept back by the gates.



Wednesday 22nd June – Day 17 – Sylvia and Sophia left around lunchtime leaving their banners on the gate, where they were promptly removed by MoD.

Thursday 23rd June – Day 18 – a couple of local activists reported that the Construction gate was still closed.

Friday 24th June – Day 19 – Phoebe was our protester for this day, cycling around the base and reporting that police were in cars at both ends of The Mearings. The Thames Valley Police told her that The Mearings are closed for the whole of June by MOD orders!! Some staff are accessing the south end in vehicles. She reported that there is still evidence of the protest at the Construction Gates at Burnthouse Lane (the stencilled slogans against Trident remained for instance), and no traffic is going in or out there. This was later confirmed by a local woman, who checks the area for us every day.

Saturday 25th June - Day 20 - Construction Gate still closed.

Sunday 26th June – Day 21 – People gathered in Reading and around Burghfield ready for the Religious Day.

Monday 27th June – Religious Day – Day 22 - three blockades were set up at North and South end of The Mearings at around 6.15 a.m.



After 2 hours the 5 people from 'Put Down the Swords' affinity group at the North end of The Mearings were cut out, arrested and taken to Newbury police station.

Three people from the Catholic Worker group attempted the blockade at the South end, one did not manage to get in the road and the other two were 'rolled' out the way and then left – they all went back round to the North end to join other protesters there.

6 people from a Quaker affinity group joined the blockade at Construction Gate, one of whom self-released, two gave their details and were informed that they would be summonsed under the MoD bye-laws, and the other 3 refused to give their details for future summons and were therefore arrested and taken to join the previous arrestees at Newbury police station. 8 arrests in all.



At around 1p.m. more than 50 people gathered for a multi-faith service that included Sikhs, Moslems, Christians and Buddhists.

Tuesday 28th June – Day 23 – early in the morning around 4a.m. Mary from Scotland painted slogans on the road by the North end of The Mearings saying 'No more deadly convoys' referring to the nuclear warheads travelling on public roads and through cities from Burghfield to Coulport up in Scotland. She was arrested and taken to Newbury police station and released around 3 p.m., charged with criminal damage.



Wednesday 29th June – Day 24 - some local supporters kept an eye on the base.

Thursday 30th June – Bristol Day and Grand Finale – Day 25 – a minibus from Bristol arrived at the North End of The Mearings.

They found that people had already started putting up big Red Xs at 7a.m. so that the workers coming in could see our refusal to accept nuclear preparations.



During the day some 30 people distributed themselves around the perimeter fence and put up big red Xs to signify a massive NO to Trident Renewal.



As the day drew to a close the red paper suits that people were wearing were also pinned to the fences – a sinister reminder of the 'shadows' left behind when the Hiroshima bomb burnt people away leaving only their shadows.

