

Forest Wars

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Forest Wars—the fight for Coolangubra!

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This video is in two parts—a case study of environmental action, followed by a discussion about the issue. A study guide/teachers' guide with additional background, exercises and projects to accompany the video is also being produced but was unavailable at the time of the review.

The case study focuses on the Coolangubra Forest in the south-east corner of New South Wales, near Eden where, we are reminded, the woodchip industry had its origins in 1969 when 22000 tons of woodchips were produced for export (the figure has exploded to six million tonnes each year in the mid-nineties).

The video begins with a caption that establishes its interest in a debate common to any resource-based economy—economic development versus preservation of natural heritage. Early images juxtapose idyllic natural settings with harsh scenes of logging and chipping. These contrasting images set the scene for the information, perspectives and arguments that follow in both visual and textual form—for example, old growth is described in consecutive scenes as a natural heritage that you have to be in to really know, and something that 'old that has to be removed to make way for the new, just as with humans'. There is a constant cycling from scenes of superb old growth eucalypts and tree ferns to stark, barren post-logging landscapes. This is not a values-neutral telling of the Coolangubra story. There are sequences of events that will likely leave the viewer feeling affronted and angry.

Protesters, union officials, timber workers and others are interviewed about demonstrations, lobbying and other forms of persuasion and inducement. Images of newspaper cuttings are interspersed with some quite graphic scenes of danger and even violence as timber workers, police and protesters engage in a struggle over the future of sections of forest.

The video also portrays the efforts of those who would influence government policy making on logging and chipping. The state political context is considered as the historical development of logging policy relating to south-east NSW is explained. Results of a government-commissioned scientific inquiry are considered, with its strengths and

weaknesses (the latter allegedly associated with the nature of the membership of the inquiry panel). Footage from Parliament House is included, with the account of the political machinations linked with this issue concluding with the recent Beddall/Faulkner furore over renewal of logging contracts and the ALP win in the NSW election in March 1995.

The Coolangubra case study supports an exploration of a range of forest management issues including preservation of natural heritage, resource production, soil erosion, watershed damage, loss of habitat, wildlife destruction, quality of life and employment. It adopts a critical perspective in examining the vested interests of most of the obvious stakeholders in the issue. Whatever the reaction of the viewer to the values and emotions on show in this production, the video certainly succeeds in demonstrating the complexity of environmental issues and the inevitability that such issues properly involve more than a straightforward scientific perspective.

Part 2 of the video provides additional perspectives and background on the effects of logging in general and the biology of forest regeneration. We are informed that although there is so much unknown about the capacity of forests to regenerate to anything like their original form, the values of an old growth forest will not be restored after logging for at least two human generations.

This is a long video, packed with information, powerful images, and a range of perspectives. It is also likely to evoke a range of emotions. There is little doubt that it would serve to inform its audiences about the complexity of the logging issue, and it would even more certainly stimulate vigorous debate about a range of philosophical questions about whether existing logging/wood chipping practices ought to continue in their current form. The audiences for a video like this would be wide—upper primary, secondary and university classes as well as community groups would benefit from viewing and appraising this program. With the increasing interest in critical forms of environmental education, visual case studies of this kind are likely to become more in demand.