



Heart of the Earth

Making a difference in the Red Hills and Gulf Coastal bioregions

Winter Solstice 2002

Alternative Transportation: Time to Get Serious in Tallahassee

By Susan Cerulean

What's the least favorite part of your day? For many Red Hills residents—for me, at least—it's the process of getting from one place I have to go, to the next. Sometimes as I drive I'm happily distracted by public radio, or a good conversation with a friend or child, but too often I find myself frustrated, stuck in a long line of left-turning vehicles, or creeping north on Magnolia during a steamy summer rush hour.

I try to focus on special natural features: plants I've come to love over the years, like the enormous mountain laurel on 6th Avenue, or the red-tailed hawk that haunts the Cascades Park area. But I can't escape the slow cycle of the traffic lights, and how my car inches forward more slowly than I could walk, and that I am immobilized, as if I were sitting on my living room couch. But I'm

not. I'm piloting a many-ton internal combustion machine that is 1.) usually taking me and my family short distances we could easily walk, bike or bus, were those options safe and convenient to exercise, and 2.) inflicting too much damage to air, water and wildlife.

Isn't it ironic that the way our bodies are designed to move, to transport us where we need to go, is essentially irrelevant to our car-cen-

tered lives? Walking, bicycling, or even horseback riding now fall into the category of "exercise," "entertainment," or "relaxation." Even worse, we too often have to travel by car to get to the places where we exercise or relax—the gym, the bike trails, the parks! It's not ironic, it's insane!

This has been the hardest issue of the Heart of the Earth newsletter to write, perhaps because the impacts of our cars are so serious, yet so seemingly intractable to solve. That said, what can we do to mitigate this situation? What's happening at the nonprofit or better yet, government level, to improve the way we travel about town? What are we willing to do at the individual level to step out of our cars, and move towards a better way of getting where we need to go?



Why is Transportation a Heart of the Earth Issue?

How does driving an automobile, truck or SUV stack up against other contributions to global warming? According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, personal transportation, ranging from cars to air travel to boating, is responsible for about 40% of all greenhouse gas emissions. The carbon dioxide released from the burning of fossil fuel increases the amount already in the atmosphere, which changes the earth's heat balance, resulting in warming. Additionally these activities contribute to water pollution and are a source of death to untold numbers of wild animals. The average new car spews about 2 tons of carbon emissions each year into our atmosphere.

Better Transportation Coalition: Working to Create Transportation Alternatives

By Kitty Kerner

Have you ever ridden your bike or taken a walk, only to find the bike path or sidewalk abruptly at an end? Ever thought how nice it would be to simply hop on a bus and avoid the downtown parking madness? Well, there are alternatives to our car dependent way of life, and the Better Transportation Coalition (BTC) is trying to get Tallahassee on the right track.

Consider this: about a third of our population doesn't drive, yet about 95% of the local transportation budget goes toward road building and related projects. BTC is campaigning to implement a more balanced system of alternative transportation modes that can be utilized by the non-driving population. We hope to address current needs like pedestrian and bicy-

clist safety and mobility, transit services for seniors and people with disabilities, as well as an improved public transport system. This could also include future light rail service. In the long run, these changes will benefit the entire community by reducing vehicular traffic, improving the environment and thus raising the quality of life.

Many of these transportation issues are already identified and addressed in various development plans adopted by the city, including the Blueprint 2000 and the Tallahassee-Leon County Comprehensive Plan. The problem is that very little has been implemented so far. Therefore, BTC seeks to provide the necessary funding for these goals, and for future needs, by allocating a third of the existing transportation funds towards alternative transportation modes (i.e., just a shift in spending, not a tax increase). A petition for a referendum on balanced transportation

spending is currently circulating. Several thousand signatures are still needed, though, before it can appear on the city election ballot. Here's how you can help:

- Sign the petition (only registered voters within city limits). You can download a copy at the BTC web site at www.tallybtc.org
 - Spread the word about this initiative! Let friends and neighbors know and encourage voters to support the better transportation referendum.
 - Come to the next public BTC meeting, where you can learn more about the issue and help build better transportation choices in Tallahassee. There are plenty of opportunities to volunteer! BTC meets the 4th Thursday of each month in the Tallahassee Room in City Hall at 6 p.m. The next meeting is January 23.
- For more information, please check out their web site at www.tallybtc.org



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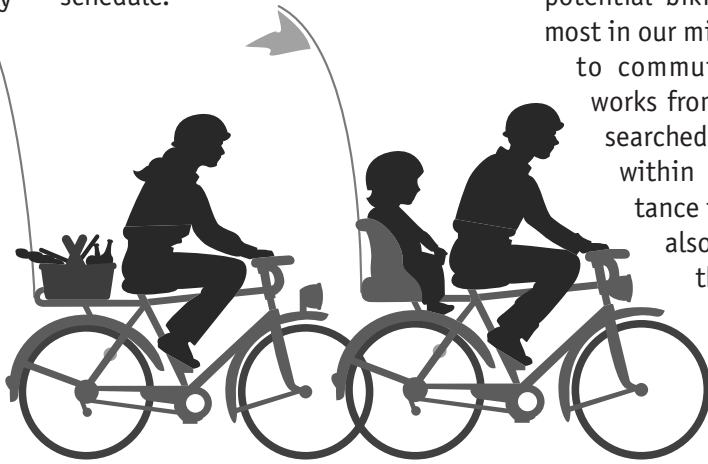
On Two Wheels Around Tallahassee: Visions of an Addicted Bicyclist

By Kitty Kerner

I admit it: I'm spoiled. I grew up in Northern Europe, where my life's transportation needs always revolved around two key items: public transport - mostly trains - for long distance travel, and my bike for practically everything else. I biked to school, to work, to visit friends, to the movies. I did all my shopping by bike and even used my two wheels for recreational purposes. Biked rain or shine, winter and summer, peeling the layers on and off according to the season. Never had a doubt in my mind that this was one of the most sensible ways to get around: fast, reliable, cheap and no parking problems. Of course, in Europe, most cities are designed to accommodate bike traffic: densely developed, with exclusive bike paths and special traffic lights. And bicyclists are acknowledged players in traffic and there are many, many more of them out there.

Here, I'm totally on my own. When I first came to Florida I thought this would be a bicyclist's heaven: mostly flat; the weather permits year round comfortable biking; and gee - there is so much space here! Just look at the wide, multilane roads and those big, unutilized medians! Alas, both infrastructure and driver mentality have a long way to go before getting

around by bike can become a daily reality. I try, though, for trips to downtown, to FSU, the library, local meetings, the video store, my favorite thrift shop, a bit of grocery shopping. But things are so spread out in Tallahassee! It's practically impossible to cover all my basic errands in one condensed area. There are times when I get along for a whole week without using the car, and others, when the extra time of taking the bike across town just doesn't seem fit in my schedule.



Then there's the intense traffic: riding my bike I often feel like a deer during hunting season. It's sobering to "share the road" with my fellow four-wheeled drivers, who don't have the slightest idea how scary it is to be passed at high speed by a huge car leaving a scant foot or so distance. Not to mention the added challenge

of feeling "safe" while riding around after dark, even with lights.

But there are bright sides. The refreshing breeze I feel on a hot summer day. The joy of watching nature change in subtle ways as I pedal along familiar paths. The little detours through quiet neighborhoods, riding in the shade of Tallahassee's majestic live oaks. The exhilaration of racing downhill. The satisfaction of going somewhere under my own power.

When we moved to Tallahassee, the potential biking options were foremost in our mind: while one of us has to commute to FSU, the other works from a home office. So we searched for a location that was within reasonable biking distance from the university and also offered good access to the St. Marks Trail, which we like to use. You can set your priorities in life and make your choices - it's really all up to you. There are 40,000 potential student bicyclists out there, think of it! How cool this city could be, were we to develop bikable, walkable neighborhoods and eliminate the need for driving to mega-stores and strip malls on the edge of town. If we could stop the sprawl, we could make better sense of our lives.



Heart of the Earth

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What is Heart of the Earth?

Heart of the Earth is a movement fostering practical actions to reduce global warming and provide more sustainable lifestyles in the Red Hills and Gulf Coastal Lowlands bioregions.

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News From Your Tallahassee-Leon County Bicycle and Pedestrian Program

By Jennifer Carver

- Your input is needed! The Tallahassee-Leon County Metropolitan Planning Organization will begin work in January on a countywide Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan. If you know of problem areas and/or have suggestions or ideas about how to make our community a better place for bicycling and walking, please let them know!

- Interested in improving your cycling skills? Join the Bicycle Commuter Training Course in February, which will be taught by a certified instructor.

- The Bike-on-Bus option can greatly extend the distances you are able to travel: every TalTran bus has a bike rack on it so you can take your bike along - for free!

For more information or to provide suggestions contact Jennifer Carver at (850) 891-8090 or at carver@talgov.com

Still Carpooling After All These Years...

By LucyAnn Walker-Fraser

Keenly aware of the dangers of global climate change, my husband Barry and I signed the Heart of the Earth pledge to reduce our fossil fuel consumption in August of 2000. Since we live in the suburbs (Killearn Lakes) and work in town, we decided to try carpooling to work. At first Barry was skeptical whether we could coordinate our schedules and lunchtime car needs, but he agreed to try it one or two days a week.

Carpooling has propelled me into some positive lifestyle changes

We soon worked out the kinks, arranging our schedules, sharing the car for lunchtime errands, and finding a co-worker who lived close by to beg a ride home when one of us had something to do after work. It proved easier than expected, and before we knew it, we were carpooling every day.

We've had to make some adjustments. I would rather go in to my office later and work later; Barry prefers the early shift. He, in turn, is sometimes frustrated because I can't

seem to get out of the door before 7 a.m. To compromise, I often eat my breakfast in the car, or sleep on the way to work, while Barry drives. We've found that not having a car always at hand is a mindset adjustment more than an inconvenience. Several times I scheduled meetings out of the office, forgetting until the last minute I didn't have a car. Others from the office were generally going to the meetings and I easily caught a ride.

Carpooling has propelled me into some positive lifestyle changes. Instead of shopping or doing errands or going to meetings at lunch, I walk or meditate, enjoying the downtown parks and pedestrian-friendly streets around the Capitol. I can walk to the library, take in events at Kleman Plaza or the Capitol, or meet a friend for lunch at a downtown restaurant. Barry discovered he could cross Blairstone on foot to enjoy the "pond" at the Winewood complex for his lunch break.

When our daughter began to drive, we faced the inevitable pressure to buy another car. Rather than buying into the hassle and expense of a third car, we realized that our carpooling habit allowed us to give her the use of our little-used second car.

Over the next year both of those cars reached the end of their ability to operate cost-effectively. We opted to buy two Toyota Echoes, a model that gets 36 miles per gallon in town. The savings in gas consumption over a year of carpooling, plus the additional savings we would achieve driving these more efficient cars, more than paid for the cost of the loans.

So, despite some increase in mileage as we went from two to three drivers in our family, we continued to realize savings over our gasoline use for two commuters in American compact cars. Here's our very own Heart of the Earth "Mastercard ad":

Gas savings from carpooling and operating more fuel efficient cars for 28 months: \$1,182

Savings from avoiding the purchase of a third car: \$12,000 or more

Insurance savings from one less vehicle in a family with a teen driver: \$1,460

Preventing 8.7 tons of carbon dioxide emissions and reducing our contribution to global climate change: Priceless

Bussing It

By Tamara Weinstein

Today I did something I haven't done since I was a kid. I walked out my door on my own two feet, turned left and walked the three blocks to my neighborhood bus stop. Today was the day I have avoided because I didn't want to take the time and effort using our public transit system instead of easily breezing around in my car. To my surprise, I had a pretty nice ride.

I've often heard how ineffective and slow our public transit system is. I wonder how many critics have actually used the bus and how many are just avoiding effort by claiming its impossibility. Which is not to say there aren't snags in the system, there are, but Dwayne Carver, TalTran's senior planner, is ready to hear your suggestions and complaints.

In our interview, Carver delineated his vision of an improved transit system, a system that encourages us to move from being "captive" passengers to "passengers of choice." The term captive refers to those of us who must take the bus due to lack of other transport, mostly teenagers, senior citizens and folks who can't afford a car. Carver envisions a future where folks will proactively choose to ride the bus. Why? To cut pollution, stop the need for more roads and thus clearing more land, and to build community.

Here's how the TalTran bus system works. There's a downtown hub located on the corner of Tennessee and Duval Streets. Most bus routes of our

star-shaped system begin and end at this point, so in order to get from A to B you will most likely have to change busses here. A free schedule book is available which shows clearly the 47 routes throughout our lovely city.

Carver envisions a future where folks will proactively choose to ride the bus.

I took four routes today and found the stops pretty comprehensive. I left Myers Park at 1:30 and arrived at the Tallahassee Mall by 1:50. Then I left the mall at 3:30 and made my way to Tom Brown Park by 3:50. Most rides around town are comparable to mine, taking about 20-40 minutes. I didn't find my trip at all tiresome, but rather, a nice day. It was nice to sit and watch the scenery and talk it up with fellow passengers. I know bus travel isn't as easy as hopping in my car, and yet I plan to use the bus as often as I can. If more of us do the same, we will help create a transit system that is both usable and pleasant—another way we consume a little less and love our red hills town a little more each day, and perhaps build a little community along the way.

Call TalTran for schedule information at 891-5200. Fares are just \$1.00, including transfers and bike transportation!

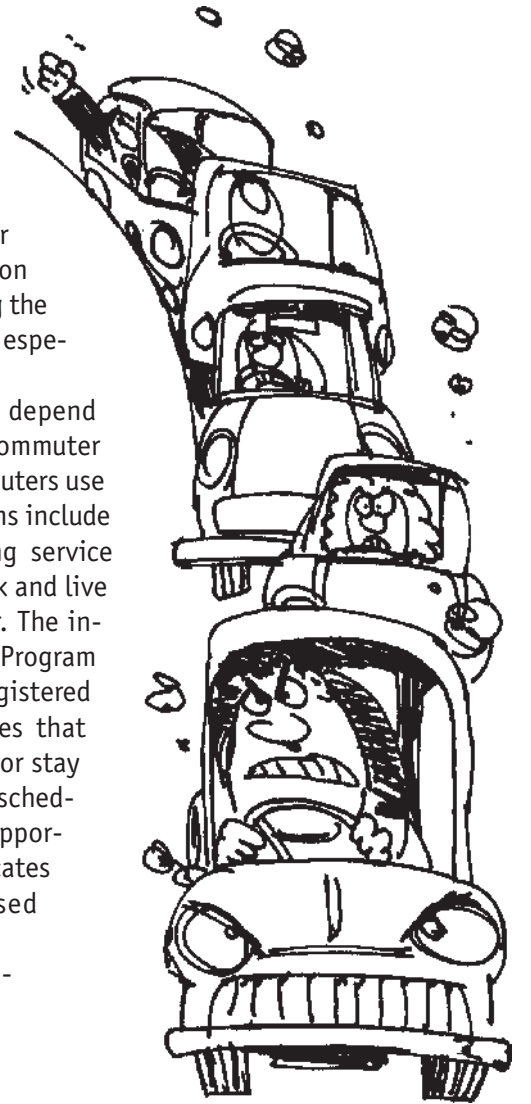
Expanding Choices in the Big Bend with Commuter Services of North Florida

by Jeff Horton

According to a recent survey, a staggering 86 percent of work commutes within the Big Bend area are made by single-occupant vehicles. Yet, commuter alternatives such as carpools, vanpools, and public transit are practical and readily available solutions. Commuter Services of North Florida promotes such alternatives by providing free assistance to individuals and employers in a nine-county region centered upon Leon County. Our goal is to reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality by reducing the number of vehicles on the road, especially during peak traffic periods.

While we know many people depend upon their personal cars, we at Commuter Services simply want to help commuters use them more efficiently. Our programs include a free computerized ridematching service that matches commuters who work and live in close proximity to one another. The innovative Guaranteed Ride Home Program provides a free ride home to registered poolers when an emergency arises that requires them to leave work early or stay late. For commuters whose work schedules and habits restrict pooling opportunities, Commuter Services advocates expanded use of employer-based flextime and telework programs.

For more information about Commuter Services of North Florida and what we have to offer, visit www.commuterservices.org or call 1-888-454-RIDE.

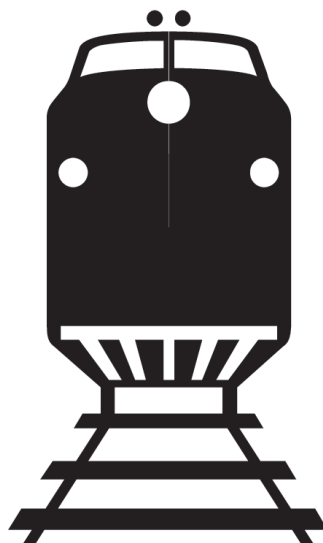


Got those Disappearing Railroad Blues?

by Jeff Bastian

My family has a long history of traveling by Amtrak train. We have "ridden the rails" to visit family in Boston and to take in New York Broadway shows. We have visited Colorado by way of the *Big Easy* and the *Windy City*, and have journeyed to Arizona to spend time at the Grand Canyon. In our experience, rail travel is slow-paced and relaxing. We like meeting fellow travelers in the observation car, or reading, sleeping or looking out the window at the country.

One way to choose among your three basic travel modes of road, air and rail is to measure each against the Heart of the Earth Pledge, instead of looking at which is faster or cheaper. As you try to reduce your consumption of fossil fuel energy sources, look at the energy efficiency of these choices. **On a per passenger mile basis, high speed trains use only one-fifth the energy of a jet plane and less than two-thirds of the energy required by an automobile.**



Unfortunately, we may be about to lose rail, the greener mode of travel. Although our government provides massive subsidies to road and air travel, rail travel is expected to be operationally self-sufficient. This has led to Amtrak's ongoing financial problems. In fact, Amtrak may be shut down unless enough of us contact local, state and federal governments and demand subsidy for rail, just as road and air are subsidized.

To find out about more about saving Amtrak visit the National Association of Railroad Passengers at www.narprail.org. For Amtrak routes, schedules and prices, log on at www.amtrak.com or call 1-800-USA-RAIL. By the way, Amtrak's train, the *Sunset Limited*, stops in Tallahassee six days a week, heading both east and west. If you want to take that midnight train to Georgia, though, you first have to take the *Sunset Limited* east to Jacksonville to catch it.

It is as if we are on a comfortable train, which is steadily traveling south at 40 mph toward planetary crisis. Some of us have become aware that something's wrong, and we've gotten up out of our seats and car by car, we're walking north. But we're still on the moving train. We need to get off the train.
— David Orr



You are invited to join the work of Heart of the Earth

The money to print this newsletter (about \$800 per issue) and to cover the minimal expenses of this voluntary movement is donated by supporters like you. Please support our vital effort. And please: do something significant each week to curb global warming!

Sign our pledge and join in our efforts to "cool the earth"

Make a contribution

- ___ \$10
- ___ \$15
- ___ \$25
- ___ \$50
- ___ \$100

Volunteer

Learning to Travel Lightly: a Checklist

1. **Inventory your driving habits and set concrete goals for cutting back. When considering a car trip, ask yourself: Do I need to go there? Can I combine trips, give a friend or neighbor a ride?**
2. **Whenever practical, walk, bicycle, and take public transportation instead of driving. Check carpooling or commuter services for getting to work.**
3. **If you move, choose a place to live that reduces the need to drive.**
4. **Think twice before you purchase another car. For occasional heavy-duty hauling needs, rent or borrow the larger vehicle. If you have to buy a car, make sure it is the right size for your every day needs, and is the most fuel-efficient and least polluting in its class.**
5. **Consider getting more actively involved with addressing transportation change in our area. To get started, check out the Big Bend Sierra Club's transportation analysis and recommendations at www.florida.sierraclub.org/bigbend. Find out where your elected officials stand regarding alternative transportation and let them know what you'd like to see happen in our area.**

Walking the Blairstone "Cut"

By Norine Cardea

About six months ago, on a mid-summer evening, a group of Heart of the Earth members walked the length of the Blairstone "cut," the new road-bed that will allow travel between Park Avenue and Centerville Road. We felt it important to quietly witness what we ask—or rather take—from our dwindling natural environment. It was a way to further accept responsibility for our part in our community's growth. We were reluctant to travel that land for the first time on a wide, slick, impressively constructed road, afraid to be seduced into letting convenience overshadow sacrifice. Our needs and the toll they take must always remain linked. At 45 mph we might not see the wetland now bisected by the asphalt strip. We might know the forest wildlife only by what lies by the roadside, killed in its attempt to cross what was once its unbroken habitat.

It was easy to call together an interested group. It was harder for some of us to cross the "no trespassing"

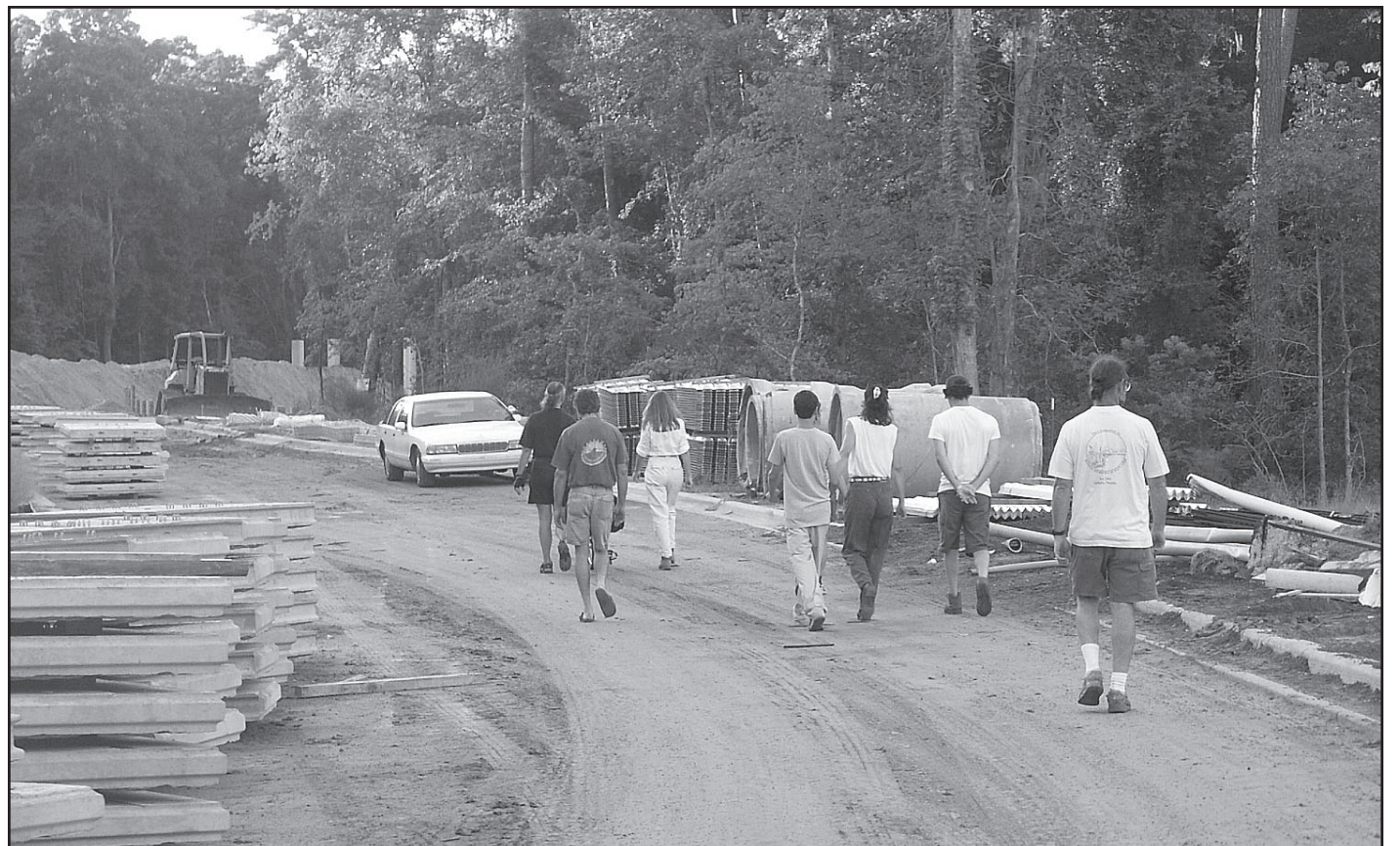
barriers. After all, we were not invited. We were not in charge. We were the consumers for whom this product had been ordered. We came to the "cut" to be accountable.

Surprisingly, we were courageous that day. While I had imagined the muddy walk, even the altered landscape, I did not anticipate the fear I would feel. It seemed a small thing, even silly; so many people of the world face much greater fears every day. Perhaps we were feeling several of our culture's undercurrents: how our true democracy is slipping away, and how our collective voice has become weak. How our individual power is being subtly undermined. How we are encouraged to consume to feel our worth. Add to these the fact that the global warming crisis to which our mode of transportation contributes greatly, is very difficult to grasp. After all, what does it mean to us here in north Florida, that the North Pole now has open water for the first time ever?

We walked on a swath hundreds of feet wide had been cut through dense and swampy forest. Top soil had been scraped away and fill trucked in. Trees, understory, and habitats were leveled and already removed. Pillars for the bridge over the railroad tracks stood silent as mute giants in the red clay of the denuded strip.

Our quiet steps and conversation allowed us to hear the movement of wind, the sound of birdsong. We paused by an exposed wetland pond to gaze at snowy egrets wading. We grew quiet. In our hearts we experienced gratitude, grief, and reverence.

This land calls desperately for caretakers, but we must quiet the pace of our lives to hear it. These interwoven lives—of which we are a part, and without which we will not survive—challenge us to imagine our most creative means of conscious growth. As in silence the snowy egrets watch us, we bear witness for them.



The Heart of the Earth Pledge

I vow to investigate what it means to become native to this place, and to do so in accordance with the ecological realities of this landscape;

I vow to investigate the use of fossil fuel energy sources by my household, and as far as I am able, to reduce that use by 30% within the next 36 months;

I will measure my purchases, travel, lifestyle and desires against the following two questions:

Is it sustainable?

What do the unborn of all species, all those waiting to be born, ask of me now?

After reading this issue, please take a moment to give us feedback about what motivates you to change. Has anything we've offered here helped you get started? And what exactly have you done or intend to do?

Be sure to check our website at www.heartoftheearth.org for more articles on transportation, like long distance travel by greyhound, effect of roads on local wildlife, use of synthetic oils and a list of resources and related web sites.

Call and Answer

By Robert Bly

**Tell me why it is we don't lift our voices these days
And cry over what is happening. Have you noticed
The plans are made for Iraq and the ice cap is melting?**

**I say to myself: "Go on, cry. What's the sense
Of being an adult and having no voice? Cry out!
See who will answer! This is Call and Answer!"**

**We will have to call especially loud to reach
Our angels, who are hard of hearing; they are hiding
In the jugs of silence filled during our wars.**

**Have we agreed to so many wars that we can't
Escape from silence? If we don't lift our voices, we allow
Others (who are ourselves) to rob the house.**

**How come we've listened to the great criers-Neruda,
Akhmatova, Thoreau, Frederick Douglas-and now
We're silent as sparrows in the little bushes?**

**Some masters say our life lasts only seven days.
Where are we in the week? Is it Thursday yet?
Hurry, cry now! Soon Sunday night will come.**

This poem originally appeared in The Nation. Copyright 2002 Robert Bly. Reprinted with his permission.