

Wild Times

About Time

by Joe Foy

We all grow old over time. It's a plain fact of life that you have never been older than you are right now. Of course, it's also true that you will never again be as young as you are right now.

The amount of time we spend thinking about time is one of those things that makes humans different from the other species we share the planet with. I doubt grizzly bears or marmots spend much time contemplating how many centuries their ancestors have been walking the same trails that they themselves walk today.

But humans enjoy rolling time around in our mind. We crave it.

There are places where you can literally reach out and touch time. Coba is one of those places. Located on the Yucatan Peninsula in present-day Mexico, Coba was once at the centre of a powerful Mayan city state.

Recently there have been calls from former logging towns, like Port Renfrew and Tofino, to end the logging of old-growth forests.

About a thousand years ago, give or take a few centuries, Coba built a pyramid. It still stands today. You can climb its steps to the very top – like I did several years ago – to look out over the seemingly limitless Yucatan

forest, with stone temples poking up through the forest canopy.

You think about all sorts of things in a place like Coba. For me, seeing how the ruins and the forest had grown together in a symphony of time was a powerful experience.

On the other side of the planet, in the present-day nation of Cambodia, I recently came face-to-face with another time-warped nature-human mashup. The legendary temples of Angkor Wat have been living with the forests for about a thousand years. Some nearby temples, such as those at Sambor Prei Kuk are even older. It is mindblowing to see a thousand-year-old stone face, with trees growing out of it like a woody hairdo.

Monstrous tree roots spread like candle wax across the roofs and down the walls, sometimes engulfing entire buildings. Everywhere is the forest and the sounds of the forest – crickets, birds and the rustling of leaves. Incense and earthy aromas mingle in the breeze.

Humans are drawn to such places like deer to a salt lick.

Our rice farmer turned guide at Sambor Prei Kuk makes at least part of his living walking visitors around the ancient tree-covered ruins. In the past, B-52 bombers from the USA were the biggest threat to this sacred place. Our guide points out craters and blast damage amongst the temples. But these days chainsaws lurk in the jungle. On some nights, he sleeps in the forest to guard the trees from illegal loggers. He figures this sacrifice is worth it, to protect his livelihood – and to give a little of his time to protect this special place.

Back home on the misty west coast of present-day British Columbia, people are drawn to defend old-growth forest groves by the same forces that keep my Cambodian rice farmer guide awake at night.

Old-growth trees in coastal BC live well over a thousand years. One yellow cedar tree that grew on BC's Sunshine Coast was over 1,800 years old when it was felled by a chainsaw in the 1980s. After a century and a half of logging, so many of BC's ancient groves have met the same fate.

Recently there have been calls from former logging towns, like Port Renfrew and Tofino, to end the logging of old-growth forests. People can see it makes better business sense to protect ancient groves that people want to come and see.

The recent protests and blockades over old-growth logging in southern Vancouver Island's Walbran Valley have made these calls for preservation even more urgent.

Standing among the giant ancient

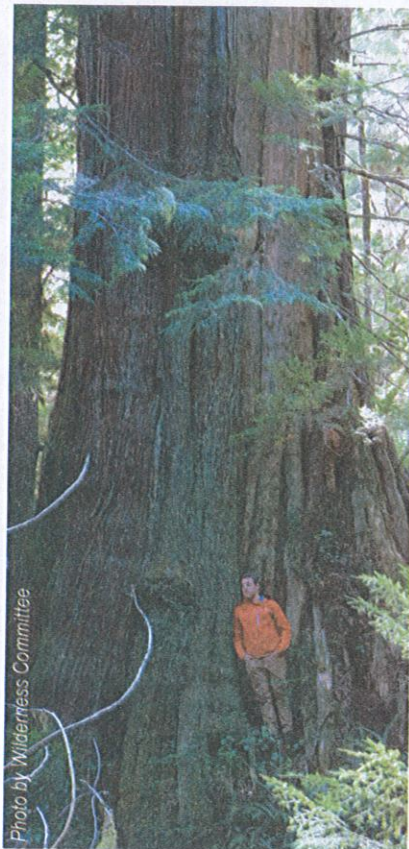
trees of the Walbran Valley, as I have many times, is certainly a life-altering experience. The awe-inspiring sight of massive trunks held in place by braided roots, the sound of falling water and winter wrens all blend together in the cool Pacific breezes.

These sacred places – Coba, Angkor Wat, Sambor Prei Kuk and the Walbran Valley – are all about time and our place in it.

Consider using some of your time to visit the Walbran's ancient groves, then work for their protection. After all, it's a very human thing to do.



Joe Foy is the national campaign director for the Western Canada Wilderness Committee, Canada's largest citizen-funded membership-based wilderness preservation organization.



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Sentinel

Box 1270, Comox BC, V9M 7Z8
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