

Photographs by Jim Wilson/The New York Times

Shirley Dean, left, 71, Betty Olds, 86, and Sylvia McLaughlin, 90, took part in a tree-sit yesterday to protest a plan in Berkeley, Calif., to cut down most of a stand of oaks to make way for an athletic center.

A Dose of Maturity for a California Protest

By JESSE MCKINLEY

BERKELEY, Calif., Jan. 22 — It is not every day that tree-sitters are older than the tree, but on Monday a trio of environmental activists with a combined age of 247 climbed into an oak tree here for an hour to protest a hotly contested building plan.

A stand of 50 coastal oaks just outside Memorial Stadium at the University of California, Berkeley, would be mostly cut down as part of a \$125 million project to build a new athletic training center. That plan prompted protesters to begin a tree-sit (a not uncommon form of civil disobedience in California) in early December, a campaign generally manned by a group of scruffy looking younger people in perches 30 or 40 feet above the ground.

But the protest received a shot of maturity on Monday morning when Shirley Dean, 71, Betty Olds,

86, and Sylvia McLaughlin, 90, climbed a ladder and mounted a jury-rigged platform about 15 feet up.

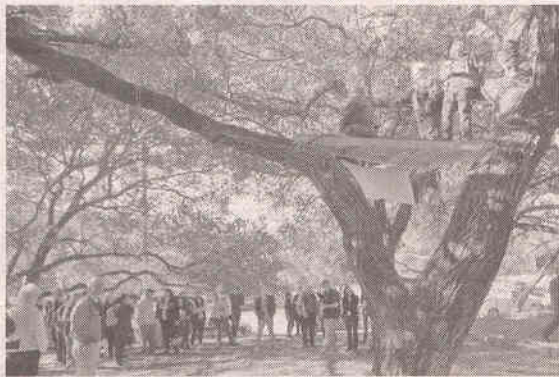
"Nobody's going to cut us down," Ms. Dean, a former Berkeley mayor, told a crowd of about 75 supporters, "and nobody's going to cut these oaks down."

The pro-oak lobby is among several groups that have sued the university over the new center and elements of a larger plan for renovations and seismic retrofits on the stadium, which sits on the Hayward Fault. Marie Felde, a spokeswoman for the university, had no comment on Monday's protest, but said the new athletic center was necessary to help move athletic personnel and student athletes out of the 83-year-old stadium, where the coaches have offices and where the athletes train.

Doug Buckwald, an organizer of the protest, said the oaks, which create a shaded acre just outside the stadium's western gates, were too precious to lose. "An urban forest is a rare thing to have," Mr. Buckwald said, "and we have a beautiful one here."

Mr. Buckwald added that at least one of the oaks could be more than 200 years old, though the tree sat in on Monday was relatively youthful, probably about 90. That made it about as old as Ms. McLaughlin, a prominent California conservationist who seemed comfortable up a tree, reading a book and eating a candy bar while dangling her legs off the platform.

Not so for Ms. Dean, who stood holding tight to a branch during the hourlong sit-in, and was the first one out of the tree. "I'm scared to death because I'm scared of heights," she said. "But maybe this will cure it."



Ode to an oak grove



Photos by **STANLEY HUANG**

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY, professor-emeritus Peter Dale Scott (above) reads a poem mocking the university for its decision to ax the live oak grove in front of Memorial Stadium to build a sports facility. "I think that I shall never see/A touchdown lovely as a tree," Scott said at a rally Saturday to save the trees. Tree sitters such as 'Major Tom' (below) have occupied six of 42 live oaks and a redwood tree for a month in an attempt to stop the trees' axing.



Tree sitters inspire mix of poetry and activism

By **William Brand**

STAFF WRITER

BERKELEY — A band of tree sitters, who have been camping out aloft in a grove of threatened Coast Live Oaks in front of Memorial Stadium for the last month in an attempt to stop the University of California, Berkeley, from cutting down the grove to make room for a sports facility, staged a welcome-back party Saturday afternoon for students returning from winter break.

It was an affair to make even the most cynical Berkeley protester proud and drew about 150 onlookers, a mix of activists, community members and a sprinkling of students to the grove facing Piedmont Avenue near Bancroft Way.

Poet Peter Dale Scott, a retired UC Berkeley English professor, read a poem, mocking the university for favoring touchdowns over trees; Berkeley assistant professor Ignacio Chapela presented a satellite analysis of the grove's importance at the cusp of Berkeley's wildlands-urban interface and Wavy Gravy of the Hog Farm Commune led a parade to the grove's lone redwood, where — yes — they hugged the tree.

It was enough to make a hard-core tree-hugger-hater blanch. But there were none of those at this Berkeley event

Please see **TREES**, Metro 2

Huggers find 'tree love' in Berkeley

► **TREES**, from Metro 1

Saturday — or if there were, they kept their peace.

The sports facility plan faces four lawsuits, one by the city of Berkeley, one by the Panoramic Hill neighborhood association, one by a group of nonprofits including the California Oak Foundation and one by Cal football fanatics upset because the project will eliminate "Tightwad Hill," a promontory where it's possible to watch games from outside the stadium.

The university is currently under a temporary restraining order. Arguments for a permanent ban on construction will be held Tuesday in Alameda County Superior Court.

The university states the entire plan was public and open to public comment. But speakers scoffed.

Sylvia McLaughlin, the co-founder of the movement that

saved San Francisco Bay shoreline from rampant development, stopped by to applaud the effort to prevent the university from chopping down the grove to make way for a new sports facility.

The university should make the grove an outside classroom, where students can learn about the importance of oak trees, McLaughlin said. "To me it's a question of values, and I come down on the side of the trees," she said.

"The university should build its sport facility on a parking lot. There are a lot of nice parking lots across campus. There's one right across from Edwards Field (on Bancroft Avenue at Oxford Street) that would be just right," she said.

Chapela, an assistant professor of Microbial Ecology, showed Google Earth photos demonstrating the slender band of greenery the ancient oak trees

provide, linking the city to the wildlands to the east. Cut them down, it's gone, he said.

For his poem, Professor Scott paraphrased Joyce Kilmer's poem "Trees," for a sarcastic assault on the sports training facility plan.

"I think that I shall never see/
A touchdown lovely as a tree," Scott said. "It's great to watch kids play a game/ Big money makes it not the same./ And where Big Money is the rule/ A school forgets it is a school," he said.

The tree-hugging came last with Wavy Gravy leading the procession, playing the kazoo. After a brief conversation with the redwood tree sitter, Zachary Running Wolf, an unsuccessful Berkeley mayoral candidate, everyone proceeded to hug the tree.

The day ended with songs by Country Joe McDonald, famous for his 1960s anti-Vietnam war anthems.