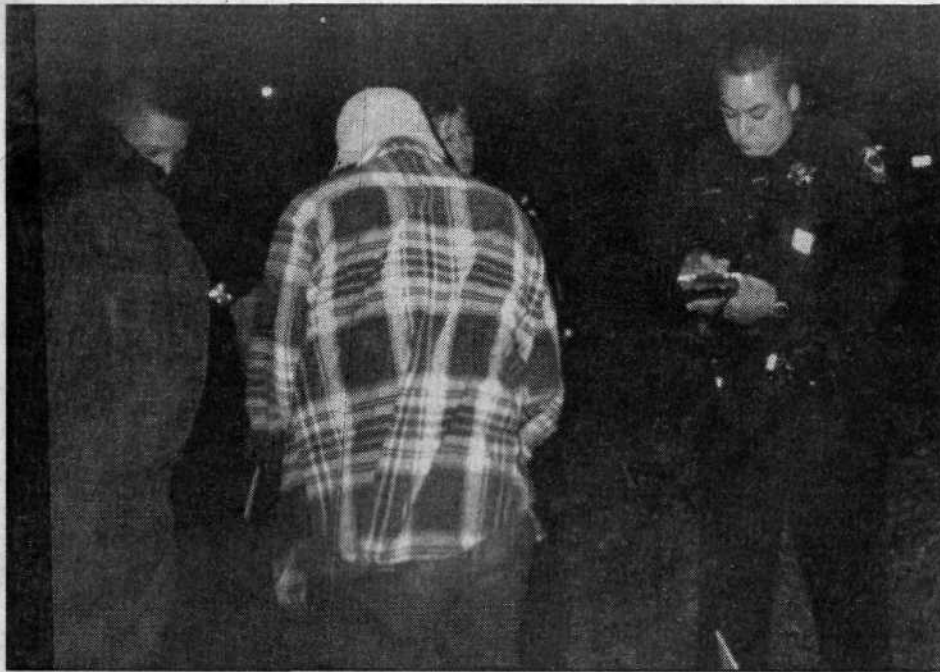
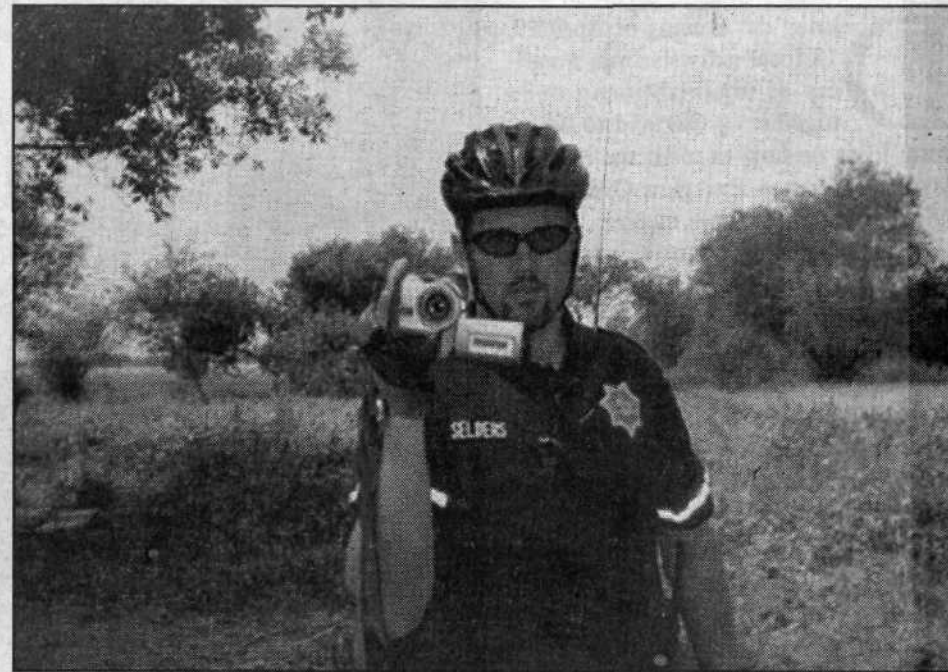


Arcata Activist Resists 'Homeless Cleansing'



Arcata police arrest and fine the homeless for the "crime" of sleeping outdoors.



Arcata police are using arrests and surveillance to clamp down on the homeless.

by Robert Norse

Arcata, California, a town of 20,000 nestled in the far northwestern corner of California near the Oregon border, is a university town, heavy with environmental and political activists, and more often than not boasts a unique Green Party majority on its five-member City Council. It is also locked in a far less unique, far too familiar, struggle to harass, disperse, and disenfranchise its 300 homeless residents.

Tad, 46, uses his first name only as a matter of religious conviction. (Though his full name is "Tad," he is sometimes identified on court dockets as "Tad Robinson.") He ran into hard times in the Central Valley five years ago, and began walking the country in search of a new way of life. A journey of several months on foot took him to Sedona, Arizona.

Once there, he was busted three times for "lodging" in national forests — each time for not having a permanent address.

"The forest manager had a new piece of territory to clean the hippies out of," Tad said. "At the end of that, I realized you can't camp in a national forest, can't camp in the city, can't camp anywhere. It's pointless to walk if you can't sleep."

He hitched back to the North Coast. Tad moved to Arcata to research a book on the historical connection between Standard Oil Company and marijuana prohibition. Using the university facilities and living outdoors, Tad made progress until a local soup kitchen abruptly cut all the locks on the homeless lockers and threw his notebooks into the dumpster.

Police hit closer to home when they observed him and a friend picking-up garbage by his campsite near an overgrown area traditionally used by folks

outside as a sleeping area called the Field. Arcata has indoor emergency shelter for only 12 of its 300 homeless people. Frustrated in not being able to find Tad's campsite, Arcata police used prison labor to clear-cut the Field in February 2003.

Two weeks later, Tad went to the Arcata City Council for the first time and publicly denounced them for the anti-homeless clear-cutting. He also spoke about how the local "care center," Arcata Endeavor, would trap kids, running people's names in the morning for warrants.

"I don't have any problem with the whole Continuum of Care," Tad said later. "The homeless alcoholic who needs a route to get sober — it's a great thing. I do have a problem with all this going to benefit a few when everybody else is being persecuted for their economic status."

The very next day, police gave Tad his first camping citation under an Arcata anti-

camping law that carries a fine of \$84. In protest, Tad and five others assembled in the Field with protest signs and banners to protest Arcata's camping ban, its selective enforcement of downtown ordinances, and its use of prison labor to eradicate homeless survival camps.

"We definitely think [a campground for homeless people] is the only affordable immediate solution," said Tad. "The economy is not getting better. The city is not getting richer. The housing is not going to be here. People have to stay somewhere, and if you want it to be illegal in the sewer system they call the Marsh [a traditional camping area for the unhoused], then you have to provide them a place that it is legal for them to stay."

In spite of support from Green Party City Councilman Dave Meserve, two