

Icy Waters Lap at Feet of Man Chained to Rock

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COLUMBIA—Beaver tails slapped warnings on the waters of the Stanislaus River as a small raft glided through the darkness toward the hiding place of a young environmentalist whose lonely protest has effectively stopped the filling of New Melones Reservoir.

On the raft were two newsmen, the first outsiders to confirm that 30-year-old Mark Dubois actually has chained himself to a rocky ledge just 2 feet from the surface of the reservoir which, until Monday, was filling steadily with runoff from melting Sierra snows.

The raft made its way among the tops of nearly submerged trees to within yards of the shoreline hide-away where Dubois—with the aid of an eye bolt, a short chain and a padlock—has forced the U.S. Army to do what years of pleading with bureaucrats and politicians could not.

"As this lower river has gone (underwater), a part of me has gone. It's been painful. I've shed a lot of tears," said Dubois early Thursday, explaining why he chained himself to the

rocks and gave the Corps of Engineers an ultimatum—stop filling New Melones or risk drowning him.

"I know time will heal everything, and it will only leave a scar. But I know the filling doesn't have to continue."

By opening a valve in New Melones Dam and spilling millions of gallons of water downstream, the corps has stopped the reservoir from rising.

The corps—along with local sheriff's deputies and scores of searchers on foot, in helicopters, planes and boats —has also conducted a massive search of the reservoir shoreline since Monday in a vain attempt to find Dubois. Calaveras and Tuolumne County sheriffs have called off their search.

"Our latest information is he is not chained," Tuolumne County Sheriff Wallace Berry said Wednesday. "We've received information he is safe from the water . . . I would say the threat of suicide is a hoax."

However, during an interview in the early hours Thursday, Dubois in-

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deed was chained—and very close to the icy water's edge.

Only a white sock on one of his size 17 feet protected his ankle from a heavy chain fastened to a massive eye bolt, which in turn was firmly anchored in solid rock.

"The keys are hidden 100 feet from here, and when I get a commitment the filling will stop . . . I will tell (friends) where they are," said Dubois, his 6-foot, 8-inch frame draped in a field blanket and sleeping bag.

His skin is beginning to show signs of irritation from the poison oak that laces the rocks where he sleeps. Since chaining himself in place Monday, Dubois has kept busy writing letters, reading and musing over how close the searchers have come.

"It's amazing how fast their boats go," he said.

Dubois' example apparently inspired two other foes of the New Melones project to chain themselves to rocks at the water's edge near Parrotts Ferry.

Officials, however, seemed relatively unconcerned about the two—David Lynch and Alexander Gaguine because their whereabouts is known and presumably they could be released without incident.

The Corps of Engineers, meanwhile, continues its search for Dubois and its deliberations over whether to continue with filling the reservoir.

The engineers need to raise the surface only a few more feet to have enough water for a test of the dam's turbine generators.

Dubois lives a spartan life as executive director of Friends of the River, taking only the portion of his \$150-a-month salary needed to meet expenses incurred in his fight to get governmental agencies to change their policies on New Melones.

A vegetarian, Dubois maintains his

He said heavy spending by farmers defeated the initiative.

weight at 180 pounds on a diet of nuts and vegetables.

"He has twosmania. Two pair of pants, two sandals and two T-shirts," a friend said.

One course shy of an anthropology degree, he dropped out of college to pursue his first love—rafting on the Stanislaus where he helped organize raft trips for handicapped children.

"When you've spent as much time in this canyon as Mark has, it's like a

The group Dubois heads, Friends of the River, says the filling to date has wiped out wildlife habitat and a stretch of the river prized as a train-

ing ground for beginning rafters.

Upstream whitewater stretches prized by more experienced rafters would be inundated if the corps moves ahead with its plans next year to raise the reservoir almost 100 feet more. Approximately 13,000 acres of the canyon that Dubois says has become part of him would be covered.

Gov. Brown Wednesday sent a telegram to President Carter requesting that New Melones be kept at its present level to preserve "the beauty of the Stanislaus River Canyon and the life of Mark Dubois."

Brown's chief of staff, Gray Davis, met with the corps' district engineer, Donald O'Shei, Thursday to announce what he called "a great victory for the environmentalists."

Davis said the colonel would "confirm to the governor in writing the corps will not allow the water to rise above the level at Parrotts Ferry while the project is under the corps' jurisdiction."

But before the corps, which has built the dam, can turn it over to the federal Bureau of Reclamation, which by law will operate it, tests must be performed on the dam's turbine generators.

In order for those tests to be made, the corps has said it must fill the reservoir to the present level—which is more than Dubois would like to accept.

"The corps is not going to let the water rise at all until they have com-

municated this agreement to Mark Dubois and obtained his reaction," Davis said. That reaction will not be available until at least tomorrow.

Brown supported a 1974 ballot initiative that would have prevented construction of New Melones Dam.

Dubois was among the early champions of that initiative, which appeared on the ballot as Proposition 17 and was defeated by the voters.

He says the defeat was due more to heavy campaign spending by farmers and other interest groups opposed to the measure than it was to widespread public support for the dam.

"A poll done by . . . professional pollers after the election showed that 59% of the voters thought they were voting against the dam," Dubois said.

Those who opposed Proposition 17 want the irrigation water and hydroelectric power it will produce, while Dubois argues that the water and power would be unnecessary if existing resources are used more wisely.

Ever since the 1974 election, Dubois and Friends of the River have been battling the New Melones project at virtually every level of government with only fleeting successes.

"I always knew I would have to make a personal statement at some point," he said. "I framed it in the dim light by branches of a budding buckeye tree that overhangs his hideout.

Dubois, perched on his rocky ledge

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on the New Melones reservoir, represents one pole of the debate as it once again has moved into the public eye.

At the other pole is O'Shei, the district engineer for the corps' Sacramento office, which has charge over New Melones. The two men view each other with respect.

"I know he's doing what he thinks is right. . . . It's just he has different values," Dubois said.

And what does the colonel think of Dubois?

"Quite a bit actually. He's rational, dignified, quite intelligent. I'm somewhat surprised Mark would take such a bizarre action," O'Shei said.

Dubois, nodding at the water that has held a steady level since he chained himself in place Monday, said he is confident the corps would not do anything to jeopardize his life.

"The corps seems to value human life more than it values the life of this canyon. Somehow, I've never been afraid," he said.