

Who are the Founders of Greenpeace?

In recent years a controversy has developed on the subject of who are the founders, or cofounders, of Greenpeace. I have always considered myself to be a founder of Greenpeace, and until a few years ago, the Greenpeace organization didn't seem to have any problem with that. Until recently, I was explicitly listed as one of the founders on the Greenpeace International website. Possibly coincidental with my decision to come out publicly in favor of nuclear energy, there has lately been a concerted effort on Greenpeace's part to deny that I am a cofounder and to damage my reputation as an environmentalist. This short essay is my side of the story, told in an effort to set the record straight and to give the reader some historical information on the subject of Greenpeace's early development.

There has always been an element of historical revisionism in the Greenpeace organization. It is natural for people to see themselves at the center of things, but it is less natural to make things up, distort historical timelines, write certain people out of the story, and otherwise boost your own self-importance at the expense of others. There has lately been a rash of such activity, much of it about who were the "real" founders of Greenpeace.

The late Bob Hunter, one of the most important leaders and communicators in the early years, claimed you could find a Greenpeace founder in nearly any bar in Canada (Greenpeace was founded in Vancouver, Canada). It turns out he was pretty much right, given the number of ex-Greenpeacers who lay claim to that honor today. The truth is that Greenpeace was always a work in progress, not something definitively founded like a country or a company. Therefore there are a few shades of gray about who might lay claim to being a founder of Greenpeace.

Fortunately, no one claims to be *the* founder of Greenpeace or about 50 people would be left on the sidelines. There is no doubt it was a committee from the beginning when the Don't Make a Wave Committee was formed. With the exception of David McTaggart, who later ruled for many years, there was never a single leader, as the group was more like a collective. Part of the continuing debate about who was a founder and who was not has to do with the fact that the Don't Make a Wave Committee was not called Greenpeace at first but evolved and changed its name to Greenpeace over time.

One thing is certain. The Don't Make a Wave Committee was established by Jim and Marie Bohlen, Paul Cote, and Irving and Dorothy Stowe in 1970.¹ The objective was to campaign against the U.S.'s testing of hydrogen bombs at Amchitka in the Aleutian Islands. Marie Bohlen is credited with the idea that the committee should sail a boat to the nuclear test site, based on her recollection of the voyage of the *Golden Rule*, which

¹ Certificate of Incorporation, "Don't Make a Wave Committee," *BC Societies Act*, October 5, 1970, <http://beattystreetpublishing.com/confessions/references/don't-make-a-wave>

sailed from Hawaii to protest against America's H-bomb tests in the South Pacific in the 1960s.²

No one can deny this small committee was the seed that grew into Greenpeace. Its members raised awareness of the H-bomb tests, organized a benefit concert with Joni Mitchell, James Taylor, Phil Ochs, and the local Vancouver band Chilliwak, and recruited a crew of dedicated young environmentalists and antiwar activists, myself among them, to join the committee. They found John Cormack and his halibut-fishing boat, the *Phyllis Cormack*, and announced they were looking for crew to sail to the nuclear test site. I eagerly volunteered.

It was Bill Darnell, a carpenter and trade unionist, who coined the name that would become known around the world. As he left an early meeting of the committee, Irving Stowe wished him goodbye by saying "peace," as was the habit at the time. Bill replied, "Why don't we make it a green peace?" and the idea was born. The organization remained The Don't Make a Wave Committee, but they decided to nickname the *Phyllis Cormack* "The Greenpeace" for the protest voyage. All the press accounts of the first voyage refer to the "crew of the Greenpeace." It was only during later campaigns that it became "the Greenpeace crew."

On March 14, 1971, the committee publicly announced its plan to sail the *Phyllis Cormack* to the test site.³ The *Vancouver Sun* covered the story the next day including a photo of Jim Bohlen and Paul Cote with the *Phyllis Cormack* in the background. On the same day, April 15, Bob Hunter wrote a letter of introduction to the Don't Make a Wave Committee, asking if he could have a berth on the ship.⁴ My letter with the same request followed one day later on March 16.⁵ The next meeting of the Don't Make a Wave Committee, in the basement of the Unitarian Church, was attended by about 25 people.

Both Bob and I were already well known to the organizers. A journalist by trade, Bob had a daily column on the front page of the second section in the *Vancouver Sun* and wrote regularly on environmental issues, including the Amchitka nuclear tests. I had made a reputation with my criticism of the Island Copper Mine proposal, which I believed would harm the environment. This story had been covered by the local media. It was not long before both of us became named as crew members, Bob as a journalist and myself as the expedition's ecologist. We were to sail with Jim Bohlen as leader, Lyle Thurston as the ship's doctor, Ben Metcalfe and Bob Cummings as journalists, Dave Birmingham as engineer, Robert Keziere as photographer, Terry Simmons as a representative of the

² Lawrence S. Wittner, "The Long Voyage: The Golden Rule and Resistance to Nuclear Testing in Asia and the Pacific," *The Asia Pacific Journal*, February 22, 2010, [http://www.japanfocus.org/-Lawrence S - Wittner/3308](http://www.japanfocus.org/-Lawrence_S_-_Wittner/3308)

³ Ken Oakes, Photo, *Vancouver Sun*, March 15, 1971, <http://beattystreetpublishing.com/confessions/references/march-15-vancouver-sun>

⁴ Correspondence, Robert Hunter to Jim Bohlen, March 25, 1971, <http://beattystreetpublishing.com/confessions/references/hunter-letter>

⁵ Correspondence, Patrick Moore to The Don't Make a Wave Committee, March 16, 1971, <http://beattystreetpublishing.com/confessions/references/moore-letter>

Sierra Club, Dick Fineberg as political scientist and Alaskan citizen. Bill Darnell also joined us as our labor representative and coiner of Greenpeace, and John Cormack was our seasoned skipper.

With about a dozen other regular supporters we spent the next six months planning for the voyage. I was working on my PhD in ecology, so my schedule was flexible and I could offer my time. Other than John Cormack and Dave Birmingham, who had spent much of their lives at sea, I was the only crew member with a fair amount of experience around boats. Bob was nervous about the seaworthiness of the *Phyllis Cormack*, so he asked me to look it over. I found the engine room particularly troubling: the engine was ancient and the exhaust manifold was propped up by a 4 x 4 timber wedged against the hull. I couldn't resist telling Bob, who was a prairie boy with no sea time, "we're all going to die." It somehow endeared me to him as we drank a few beers and joked about our imminent demise. We were blood brothers from that day on.

The crew of the *Phyllis Cormack* set sail on September 15, 1971, and this became the first voyage of many to follow. Of course we didn't know this at the time, as we made our way across the North Pacific toward the nuclear test site. Since then, September 15 has been celebrated as the birthday of Greenpeace.^{6 7 8 9} It seems reasonable that those of us who had worked for six months to make the voyage possible, during the gestation of Greenpeace, and then sailed on the first voyage, might be recognized as cofounders. And that is precisely what the Greenpeace International website implies to this day. The History of Greenpeace page begins, "In 1971, motivated by their vision of a green and peaceful world, a small team of activists set sail from Vancouver, Canada, in an old fishing boat. These activists, *the founders of Greenpeace* (my emphasis), believed a few individuals could make a difference."¹⁰ I was on that old fishing boat, so it is reasonable for me to describe myself as a cofounder of Greenpeace.

There is a list of the *Phyllis Cormack*'s crew, including me, on another Greenpeace website titled The Founders of Greenpeace,¹¹ And yet the current leadership of Greenpeace now denies that I am a founder. In March 2007 my name was removed from the list of founders on the Founders of Greenpeace website, 36 years after I sailed on the first voyage. You can view the original Founders of Greenpeace page here.¹² This

⁶ "Greenpeace, 30 Years," Greenpeace International, <http://archive.greenpeace.org/30th/>

⁷ Sebastian Stelios, "Happy Birthday, Greenpeace!" Greenpeace USA, September 15, 2009, http://members.greenpeace.org/blog/greenpeaceusa_blog/2009/09/15/happy_birthday_greenpeace

⁸ Rex Weyler, "Eyes of Fire: Greenpeace After 35 Years," Common Dreams, September 15, 2006, <http://www.commondreams.org/views06/0915-31.htm>

⁹ "Greenpeace Orders Technologically Advanced Rainbow Warrior III," Greenpeace International, July 2, 2009, <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/press/releases/greenpeace-orders-technologica/>

¹⁰ "The History of Greenpeace," Greenpeace International, September 14, 2009, <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/about/history/>

¹¹ "The Founders of Greenpeace," Greenpeace International, <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/about/history/founders/>

¹² "The Founders of Greenpeace," Greenpeace International, February 21, 2007 <http://beattystreetpublishing.com/confessions/references/original-founders>

probably resulted from my public support for nuclear energy. I am now described as an “early member” who played a minor role. Greenpeace USA has actually removed my name from the list of crew members who sailed on the *Phyllis Cormack*.¹³

I was not only a member of the original voyage but I stayed on for 15 years as a director and campaign leader. No other member of the original voyage stayed with Greenpeace nearly that long (Bob Hunter was next at six years). I was always in the top committee as we evolved from a church basement into the world’s largest environmental activist organization. When I left in 1986, we had 20 offices around the world and annual revenue of over \$US100 million. I had been one of the most prominent spokespersons for the organization, especially after Bob Hunter left in 1977. From 1977 to 1986, I was the head of the original Greenpeace Foundation, which morphed into Greenpeace Canada when Greenpeace International was created. I played an instrumental role in founding Greenpeace International in 1979 and remained one of five international directors until I decided to leave over policy differences in 1986. I was the leader of the 1977, 1978, and 1979 campaigns to save the whales in the Pacific. I was the leader of the 1978 and 1981 seal campaigns on the east coast of Canada. I also led campaigns against trophy hunting, supertankers, the capture of orca whales, and nuclear weapons-carrying warships. I was a member of many other campaigns, often second in command. In fact I was either the designated or de facto second in command in the early years to Jim Bohlen, Ben Metcalfe, and Bob Hunter.

Today Greenpeace says, “Although Mr. Moore played a significant role in Greenpeace Canada for several years, he did not found Greenpeace. Phil Cotes, Irving Stowe, and Jim Bohlen founded Greenpeace in 1970. Patrick Moore applied for a berth on the *Rainbow Warrior* in March, 1971.”¹⁴ Whoever wrote this was probably born after 1971. It was Paul Cote, not “Phil Cotes” and *the Rainbow Warrior* didn’t come along until six years later. I signed on to the *Phyllis Cormack* in April 1971. If you want to rewrite history, you should at least get the names right.

Another organizer of the first voyage, Rod Marining had worked hard to get on the crew. Rod had eco-credentials as he had fought to prevent a large hotel development at the entrance to Stanley Park in Vancouver. He put up a tent on the site and vowed to block construction. In the end he and his supporters won and today the area is an extension of the park. Even though Rod was not chosen for the crew he lived in hope. After we set sail from Vancouver he followed us up the coast to Alaska. When Dick Fineberg decided to get off in Kodiak on our way home, Rod was there, waiting for a berth. We recognized his zeal and took him aboard. So in all there were 12 crew plus Captain John Cormack aboard the original voyage; J.C. and his 12 disciples, as we quipped. Rod Marining was a member of the first voyage and can therefore claim to be a co-founder, according to the definition offered on the History of Greenpeace website.

¹³ “The Founders,” Greenpeace USA, <http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/about/history/the-founders>

¹⁴ “Patrick Moore Background Information,” Greenpeace USA, <http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/campaigns/nuclear/patric-moore-background-inform>

When the H-bomb test was delayed for one month, the decision was made that the *Phyllis Cormack* would not continue toward Amchitka. A group of supporters back in Vancouver decided to launch a second boat. Our voyage had become a major news item in British Columbia and tens of thousands of people were marching in the street against the bomb. There was a lot of energy behind getting another, larger boat off the dock before the nuclear test went off. The *Edgewater Fortune*, a former Canadian minesweeper, was leased and a crew of 28, none of whom had been involved in the organization of the first voyage, was assembled. Among these was Paul Watson, who would become a prominent campaigner and leader on the early whale and seal campaigns. When he was voted off the Greenpeace board in 1977, he founded the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society and focused his attention on sinking whaling ships and most recently campaigning against the Japanese whalers in the Antarctic.

Bob Hunter, still recognized as a founder by today's Greenpeace newbies, said of Paul Watson's dismissal, "The reasons were that he was divisive, irresponsible and far more concerned with his own name in print than solving the ecological problems with which Greenpeace is trying to come to grips. Every organization sooner or later is plagued with the problem of destructive troublemakers in its midst."¹⁵

On his Sea Shepherd website, Paul Watson claims, "I was a founding member of the Don't Make a Wave Committee in 1970."¹⁶ This is simply false. The Don't Make a Wave Committee founders, Jim Bohlen, Paul Cote, and Irving Stowe were quite conservative by nature and couldn't stomach Watson. As Bob Hunter wrote in *Warriors of the Rainbow*, they found him undesirable because, "he had North Vietnamese flags stitched to his army jacket, wore Red Power buttons, Black Power buttons, and just about any kind of antiestablishment button that could be imagined."¹⁷ That was why he was not chosen for the first voyage, even though he had some experience at sea and was young and eager.

Paul Watson goes on to claim, "When Greenpeace was officially registered as the Greenpeace Foundation in 1972, I was one of the signatory founding directors." The Greenpeace Foundation was established on May 4, 1972, and was the first registered organization to use the name Greenpeace. This was accomplished simply by changing the name of the Don't Make a Wave Committee to Greenpeace Foundation. This occurred at the height of the first campaign against atmospheric nuclear testing by France at Mururoa Atoll. David McTaggart was already on his voyage from New Zealand aboard the sailing ketch *Vega*. Paul Watson had no involvement whatsoever with Greenpeace at this time. He disappeared after the Amchitka voyage and did not resurface until the planning began for the voyages to save the whales in 1974.

¹⁵ Bob Hunter, "Whales, Wages and Sour Grapes," *Vancouver Sun*, October 1977,

<http://www.beattystreetpublishing.com/confessions/references/hunter-on-watson-1977>

¹⁶ "Greenpeace Attempts to Make Captain Paul Watson 'Disappear'", Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, <http://www.seashepherd.org/who-we-are/paul-watson-and-greenpeace.html>

¹⁷ Robert Hunter, *Warriors of the Rainbow* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1979), <http://www.amazon.com/Warriors-Rainbow-Chronicle-Greenpeace-Movement/dp/0030437415>

Paul then claims, “In 1979 I was one of the 8 signatories to establish Greenpeace International and that is an official document.” At the time Greenpeace International was founded Paul had been out of the organization for more than two years. Bob Hunter invited Paul to the meeting at which David McTaggart and I, as the president of the Greenpeace Foundation, negotiated the settlement of the lawsuit initiated by the Greenpeace Foundation against Greenpeace USA. David Gibbons, a lawyer trusted by all involved, facilitated the discussion. Rex Weyler and Rod Marining were there as board members of the Greenpeace Foundation. Peter Ballem was there as our lawyer. Bob Hunter was invited by David McTaggart, as was Michael M’Gonigle. McTaggart represented the rest of the Greenpeace world against the founding organization. If we had gone to court, the Greenpeace Foundation would certainly have prevailed as it was a cut-and-dried case of trademark and copyright infringement. But we would have been left a broken and disabled organization. It was far better to settle out of court.

The settlement resulted in the creation of Greenpeace International, with voting rights for Canada, the U.S., U.K., France, and the Netherlands. David McTaggart, definitely the most politically talented person in the organization, became chairman and I became one of five international directors, representing Canada. The right of the Greenpeace Foundation to the name Greenpeace was recognized, its debts were to be paid by the other Greenpeace offices, and in return the Greenpeace Foundation agreed to the formation of Greenpeace International. It was worth a bottle of good champagne as we kept the organization whole, and Greenpeace never looked back.

Paul Watson had nothing to do with the creation of Greenpeace International. He was in the room for the meeting, but he was not in the official photograph, likely because he had nothing to do with Greenpeace at the time. He may have signed a piece of paper, but he was not in any way involved in the negotiations or in the terms of the settlement. He has no right to describe himself as a founder of Greenpeace International. But that will likely not deter him.

When the *Phyllis Cormack* returned to a hero’s welcome in Vancouver on October 30, 1971, most of the crew returned to their normal lives. A few of us, Jim and Marie Bohlen, Bob Hunter, Ben Metcalfe, Rod Marining, and myself decided to soldier on. We soon began to campaign against French atmospheric nuclear testing in French Polynesia. If it were not for this small band of diehards, Greenpeace would probably have ended as a one-hit wonder. Most of the credit was due to Jim and Marie Bohlen and Ben and Dorothy Metcalfe who took up the leadership and helped orchestrate a vote against French nuclear testing at the first UN Conference on the Environment in Stockholm.

Greenpeace USA recently put up a web page titled “Greenpeace Statement on Patrick Moore.”¹⁸ It begins, “Patrick Moore often misrepresents himself in the media as an environmental ‘expert’ or even an ‘environmentalist’. I suppose a PhD in Ecology and an honorary doctorate in science don’t pass muster, never mind 15 years as a Greenpeace director and campaign leader. The American Greenpeacers go on to state, “While it is

¹⁸ “Greenpeace Statement on Patrick Moore,” Greenpeace USA, October 10, 2008, <http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/press-center/releases2/greenpeace-statement-on-patric>

true that Patrick Moore was a member of Greenpeace in the 1970s, in 1986 he abruptly turned his back on the very issues he once passionately defended.” Actually I remain passionately opposed to nuclear testing, whale killing, the slaughter of baby seals, toxic waste dumping, and all the issues we campaigned on during my 15-year tenure, except one. I have changed my mind about nuclear energy and for this I am maligned by people who do not know me, many of whom were not born when we sailed to stop the bomb in 1971.

To prove its point that I am not a founder of the organization, Greenpeace claims, “Patrick Moore promotes such anti-environmental positions as clearcut logging, nuclear power, farmed salmon, PVC (vinyl) production, genetically engineered crops, and mining.” Yes, I support sustainable forestry, which is sometimes best done by making clearings where new trees can grow in the sun. I have given my reasons for supporting nuclear power, vinyl and genetic engineering in my books, all of which stem from a concern for the environment and human welfare. And is Greenpeace suggesting environmentalists should be against “mining”? Have these people stopped riding bicycles, texting on cell phones, typing on laptops, and riding mass transit? How could they say anything more ridiculous?

For a time Greenpeace folks accused me of “trading on my history with Greenpeace.” My reply, “Actually, you are the ones who are trading on my history in Greenpeace.” I could go on but will sign off here. For a fuller account of the early history of Greenpeace, why I left the group in 1986, and a discussion of the key environmental challenges facing us today, you might enjoy my book, *Confessions of a Greenpeace Dropout – The Making of a Sensible Environmentalist*.¹⁹

¹⁹ Patrick Moore, *Confessions of a Greenpeace Dropout – The Making of a Sensible Environmentalist*, (Vancouver: Beatty Street Publishing, 2010, <http://www.sensibleenvironmentalist.com>)