

DUMB & DUMBER

Website mixes environmental concerns with unfair biases

There is a little known, seldom-visited Website called "Bonfire: Dumb as Dirt." As the first of the title hints, the site contains information about how the bonfire is detrimental to the environment. However, it is the Website that is dumb as dirt. Any validity the Website might have concerning environmental issues is voided by its rants about how the bonfire is an "archaic military" ritual that began when Texas A&M was "academically retarded."



MARIANO CASTILLO

Instead of expressing its claims in a professional manner, the page is tabloid in style, filled with anti-Bonfire and, by default, anti-Aggie links. The first assumption made on the page is that the 125,000 hours of work that go into Bonfire are wasted and could have been spent on academics instead of clearing a forest that may contain endangered species. It goes on to say that A&M is the only public school that is involved in the extinction process. The wording suggests Aggies' passion at cut is to grab an ax, find a box of ocelots and go to town on them. The page does not even mention what endan-

gered species are supposedly being robbed of their homes. All of the trees cut for Bonfire are on private property owned by people or companies who need the land cleared for a reason. This year a power plant will be built on the cut site. Bonfire workers are doing companies a favor by clearing the land. In exchange, Ags get to use what they cut in the annual tradition of Bonfire. The page also argues the logs burned are a valuable resource that could be used for more productive purposes, which sounds like something to think about — but wait. Instead of elaborating on the idea, the site insinuates A&M's student body is influenced by local yokels who brainwash the campus to support the "stupidity" of Bonfire. After calculating some questionable monetary figures, including putting a price tag on time that could have been spent studying, the conclusion is reached that it is a waste to see Bonfire go up in ash and smoke considering the effort put into cut. But the 30,000-70,000 people who attend Bonfire each year obviously think it is worth the work, especially the red, brown and centerpole pots who participate in Bonfire from construction to cleanup. With a campus as large as A&M



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

and a student body as diverse in opinion, it is nearly impossible to bring almost everyone together for a night of Aggie spirit. Bonfire rises to the challenge and accomplishes this feat. There is nothing to be ashamed of about Bonfire. To display its activism proudly, "Bonfire: Dumb as Dirt" includes several letters sent by A&M biology professor Hugh Wilson to government agencies, such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), arguing that Bonfire's pollution should be ruled illegal under the current air-pollution standards. Although the Aggeland skies have yet to blacken after 90 years of Bonfires, 1999 could be the year. The EPA disagrees, though. In its response, which also is posted on the Website, the EPA explains that Bonfire does not violate any laws or pollution standards. To give the site some credit, though, as poorly as it has been arranged, it does raise important points about the environment. Even pro-Bonfire students agree with this point, which is why thousands of trees are planted each spring at Replant. One might think supporters of this Website would at least acknowledge Replant as a step in the right direction, but the event is instead labeled a "scam" — a fake tradition to appease

anti-Bonfire activists and keep the headlines clean of any possible negative images of the University. There are many more misleading and twisted facts on the site, but the page should not be taken down. Every group has a right to express its self and its views. However, there should be a law against communicating information as manipulated as "Bonfire: Dumb as Dirt."

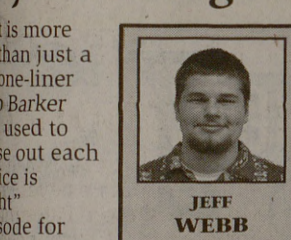
Mariano Castillo is a sophomore international studies major.

MIKE LUCKOVICH ATLANTA CONSTITUTION



Truth about cats and dogs

Bryan-College Station must control pet population



JEFF WEBB

from late April to September, pounds and shelters euthanize unwanted and abandoned cats at a rate of more than one per minute. "People don't realize how fast cats multiply," BAS worker Ashley Wesp said. Pet overpopulation is a huge problem in Texas and action needs to be taken to prevent owners from letting their pets breed freely. However, a compulsory spaying or neutering law seems far off in the distance with the amount of overpopulation awareness in the 10 surrounding counties served by the BAS. The cost of enforcing such a law is more than the public is willing to bear at the moment. In the early '90s in San Mateo, Calif., there was an attempt at a law requiring any pet owner who had not spayed or neutered their pet to buy a breeder's license. Eventually, the law was watered down to the point where it was hardly enforced, and animal lovers in the town were heartbroken. It takes a community to join together to solve this kind of problem. A survey conducted by Texas A&M graduate students a decade ago showed 86 percent of the local population said they thought there was no pet overpopulation problem. This still seems to be the

overriding attitude in the community, if the numbers of unwanted pets in area shelters is any evidence. Educating the public is the first step in the long process of cracking down on pet overpopulation. BAS director Kathy Bice is an advocate of education concerning overpopulation. "It is important to educate the people about the overpopulation," Bice said. "But it's more important to dwell on the solutions than the day-to-day tragedy." By educating the public, people can help treat the symptoms of the problem, too. On an average day at the BAS, about 70 dogs and 50 cats wait for adoption and about one-third of these animals are purebred, not unwanted mutts. There is a \$65 adoption fee, which covers the animal's shots and spaying or neutering, a bargain when considering how much it would cost to do the same thing to puppies or kittens through a veterinarian on an individual basis. In some cases, an application can be processed in half an hour. For \$65 and an hour of time, one can take home a grateful friend for life. Talk about the price being right. This might be the best bargain in town.

Jeff Webb is a senior journalism major.

Sierra Leone mimics most wars in Africa: ignored by the West

Like all African wars, Sierra Leone's brutal conflict never got the attention it deserved. It did not matter how horrendous the atrocities became, how many innocent civilians were slaughtered or how many people were driven from their homes. According to prime time media, every African crisis is third-class. Just as the descendants of enslaved Africans had to sit at the back of the bus in America, Africans today have to take the back seat in the world arena.



CAESAR RICCI

From genocide in Rwanda to ethnic cleansing in Sudan and famine-making war in Angola, world leaders have stood by and the international community has been shamefully silent while African conflicts kill millions of innocent civilians. So it should come as no surprise that the horrors of Sierra Leone's eight-year civil war struggled to make even the back pages of the newspapers, let alone television. Now that a precarious peace has been established in this dirt-poor, but resource-rich, west African country, war-scarred Sierra Leoneans have come to understand a bitter fact. The outside world, which had the ability to stop the suffering, did not care enough to do so. The actions of world powers imply that they view the lives of poor, black-Africans as expendable. But it does not have to be this way. Americans should petition the mainstream media into giving African wars coverage commensurate to the misery they cause. Citi-

zens must make clear to politicians that they value the life of a black-skinned African child as much as that of a white-skinned European. The popular media seems to assume that the public is not interested in Africa. But when did they ever take a poll to determine the common American's concern for the people of that great continent? Media neglect of African wars is unjustified. Americans cannot be expected to express interest in Sierra Leone's disaster if they never even know it exists. The unbelievable cruelty of Sierra Leone's war is what stood out most. Drugged-up rebels with no clear agenda beyond obtaining power waged a campaign of terror on civilians regardless of their political positions. The rebels' trademark was a horrifying spree of amputations against terrified people of all ages. In one British Broadcasting Company (BBC) Website article, a young boy begged rebel attackers to chop off his left hand instead of his right — because he was right-handed. The rebels heartlessly refused his plea. Then they took the severed right hand and chopped it in two to make sure no doctor could reattach it to his bludgeoned arm. The BBC estimates that 10,000 people had their limbs hacked off. But the amputations, which have left so many Sierra Leoneans completely unable to care for themselves and their families, is hardly the worst of the crimes that were committed. Even more terrible were the massacres, mutilations, gang rapes and use of child soldiers. Human Rights Watch reported rebels murdering pregnant women and then cutting out their fetuses. In one of its reports, an 8-year-old

boy who witnessed rebels slaughtering a family in the capital of Sierra Leone was interviewed. "The people were screaming, and the rebels cut their heads off," he said. "My heart was beating just about out of my chest. I felt so bad for these people. There were even children." Another account by the U.S. Committee for Refugees tells of a woman, once beautiful, who was gang-raped so many times she can no longer control her bladder functions and has mental problems. "Today, Kumba is a shadow of herself, is an eyesore, urinating on herself even when walking because it comes without control," her sister told the Committee. Although such details may be unpleasant to hear, they need to be told for the world to comprehend the horror and degradation inflicted upon Sierra Leone's people. The killings, atrocities and refugee crisis in Sierra Leone's war were much worse than those in Kosovo. Yet the world had only several dozen unarmed U.N. observers to offer Sierra Leone, in contrast to the 50,000 NATO troops Kosovo received. Action should have been taken to stop the butchery in Sierra Leone. Now it is too late. The world cannot return limbs to the mutilated, dignity to the raped or the lives of children back to their mourning parents, but it can help the devastated country to maintain its peace and rebuild. In the meantime, the world must not repeat its mistake of standing by while similar injustices and misery are heaped on Africans in Sudan and Angola.

Caesar Ricci is a junior plant and soil science major.

MAIL CALL

Allegations are overexaggerated

The alleged assault that occurred on the Bonfire field last week has been the basis of much controversy. To those of you that are "appalled" that no charges were filed, please remember that there are two sides to the story, even though both sides were not reported. I am not suggesting that the Redpots are completely free of responsibility, but the responsibility must be

shared, as there was mutual aggression between the alleged victim and the Redpots. In recent years, individuals have taken any opportunity to criticize Bonfire and anything associated with it. Whenever a complaint is made regarding this time-honored tradition, it is automatically assumed to be factual, when for the most part it is overexaggerated. Bonfire is meant to unite all Aggies, not to divide them.

Jenna Doreck Class of '97

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 300 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number. The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style, and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 013 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters may also be mailed to:

The Battalion - Mail Call
013 Reed McDonald
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX
77843-1111

Campus Mail: 1111
Fax: (409) 845-2647
E-mail: battletters@hotmail.com