



# The Fur Farm Intelligence Project

*200 Farms. 60 days.*

*By Peter Young*

In 1997, I left home with a list of fur farm addresses and drove across the country collecting notes on the U.S. fur industry. Those notes were confiscated by the FBI, I was sent to prison, and the notes were never made public.

In 2009, I organized a resurrection: a two-month road trip to every fur farm in the western U.S. The goal: compile the largest collection of raw fur industry data to date.

I drafted a budget. Bite Back wrote a check. And the Fur Farm Intelligence Project came to life.

I recruited Daisy as a road trip partner. We spent weeks scanning satellite images in fur farming regions. We cross-referenced every fur farm address collection. We assembled a binder of maps. We compiled lists of unverified addresses mined from media reports, fur industry literature, and word-of-mouth. Then we got in the car and drove.

My return trip would be absent the felonies, with an investigative scope never before attempted. Our goal was a complete blueprint of the fur industry. Every farm address, its operational status (whether open or closed), and every infrastructure target verified and mapped.

In the years since my first trip, the lynx pens of the Fraser Fur Farm and sprawling prison of Short's Fur Farm festered in the darkest part of my psyche. And in those years, I had plotted my return. After the regret of staring thousands of animals in the eye only to walk away, I would return on their behalf.

This time, I would not be giving them freedom under the cover of darkness. And while anything less is to fail them, this investigation was no less crucial to winning their freedom.

**Fur Farm Data.** The sum of the fur farm addresses we have today are found in two sources: The Final Nail #3 (2008) and TheFinalNail.com, both built from the original The Final Nail publication (1996). Yet outside of visits by the A.L.F., the “open” or “closed” status of most farms has never been physically verified. Central to our mission was this goal: providing the first status update of known fur farms in 13 years.

**Names & Addresses.** Past fur industry investigations focused on the treatment of animals; this one sought something else: names and addresses. Of all forms of outreach, the dissemination of names and addresses is among the most overlooked, and most potent. To understand the power of the name and address, one must accept a distinction between *actionable* information, and *unactionable*.

Actionable information gives an immediate call to action. Unactionable data is informative, but offers no clear “next step.” A Why Vegan pamphlet is actionable: the reader can become vegan. Information becomes less useful the further it moves from being something that can be immediately acted on. A philosophical tome on the socio-economic roots of animal exploitation may be informative, but brings no call for action. For outreach to be useful, it must *incite*.

An address gives injustice a fixed physical location, and confronts the reader with the obligation that comes with that knowledge. More than knowing *of* injustice, it is knowing *where*. The “next step” could be a protest or an undercover investigation, but an address brings the burden of action.

**The Parameters.** Any breach of property lines to obtain information for this very public project would subject our team to possible criminal prosecution, and defy the instructions of the project’s financial backers. All information would be gathered from public space.

To confirm farms the hard way, we brought tools: a unidirectional microphone (to pick up sounds of mink from a distance), military-grade digital binoculars, digital camera and video camera.

**The Architecture of Avarice.** Gathering intelligence on the fur industry has a strategic importance above that of the equally horrific meat, dairy and egg industries. In 2009, the fur industry has fewer than 400 supply-side sites. *Fewer than 400 physical structures and complexes* form the industry’s entire architecture. The entire fur industry can now be condensed into one concise blueprint. While a blueprint assists construction, it has equal utility to deconstruction.

The U.S. fur farming industry includes 274 mink farms, at most 12 feed suppliers, approx. 10 equipment suppliers (cages, etc), 5 research farms, two auction houses and a small number of processors/wholesalers. (*The trapping of animals—“wild fur”—is largely a separate industry.*)

That is it. The 274 farms are supported by a very small and vulnerable support base of research farms and feed suppliers. The end of the industry does not require the erasure of every target, only their support structure.

The fur industry is on the losing end of the scale/absorption quotient, whereby the effect of any one action is inversely proportional to an industry’s mass. In a large industry, rarely does a single target take on major significance in the supply network—there is always another company that fulfills the same role, and quickly absorbs any business from a decommissioned building or bankruptcy.

The fur industry is in stark contrast. Farms generally have only one choice for specialized feed. Industry research sites number at approximately five. Farms rely on breeding stock with genetic lines that are irreplaceable. From every angle, the fur industry is weak.

We rented a car and set out to create the roadmap to its collapse. . . .

### **Mission Statement.**

The Fur Farm Intelligence Project will compile the largest collection of hard data on fur farms and fur industry infrastructure in 13 years. The Project is an endgame mission to map the entire industry, with a primary focus on names, addresses and other actionable data.

### **Goals:**

1. Verify the operational status of every known fur farm (open/closed)
2. Discover locations of unknown farms, research locations and infrastructure sites.
3. Collect data at each location relevant to legal campaigns, including species of animals, and farm size.
4. Publicly disclose all data in a single document.

### **Phases:**

One: A two-month road trip to visit, at minimum, 75% of the fur farms in the United States.

Two: Compilation of all known data on fur industry locations into one document, forming the largest body of site-specific data to date.

Three: The public release of all compiled data in one document titled The Blueprint.



For the first farm of the trip, there was no discussion. I didn't even have to look at a map. The first stop of the trip was the first mink farm on which I'd ever stepped foot: Beck's Mink Farm in Granite Falls, Washington.

What Harvey Beck doesn't know is that we've met. Unlike most farms, Beck's utilizes a photoelectric perimeter security system, composed of a series of invisible beams broadcast between black boxes affixed to posts in each corner. Break the beam, set off the (silent) alarm. During my first visit in 1996, after five minutes inside the fence, a truck screeched to a halt at the gate. The emerging silhouettes of two men and their shovels inspired a quick exit in the opposite direction. (At the time, after experimenting with the alarms at a second farm—the nearby Jeff Craggs farm—we learned to circumvent the beam by dropping to the ground and rolling under it.) During the Fur Farm Intelligence Project, Daisy and I would encounter such alarms at only three other farms.

We dedicated our first night in Washington to the rest of Snohomish County, responsible for nearly half of all mink killed in Washington. Of the six known addresses, two were confirmed closed.

For this investigation, we were giving priority to farms raided by the A.L.F., to determine the true efficacy of these actions in not just bringing freedom to animals in the short term, but sparing future victims by shutting down farms forever. We found that the numerous small raids at Brainerd's in Snohomish had not (yet) closed this farm. And at the Roesler Bros. Fur Farm (10,000 mink released in August 2003)—almost totally enveloped in Evergreens and hidden off a dirt road—one can still hear the cries of mink echoing in the forest.

### **Government Fur Farm List: Attempt #1**

Dale was the head of “wildlife farm licensing” for the Department of Natural Resources. The next day Daisy and I were at his office in Olympia, testing the counterintuitive theory that the most guarded information can be obtained simply by asking. Dale wanted to help us get the complete list of fur farms we asked

for. He made some calls, and informed us there was no state agency that tracked fur farms. We left with his parting words lingering in our minds: “You want the USDA list. They have the address of every farm, and someone there will give it to you...”

### **“Twelve Species of Fur Bearing Animals”**

Of special interest on our Northwest fur farm list was United Farms in Graham. The farm, its address only recently made public, was described in an old issue of Fur Rancher as housing, “twelve species of fur bearing animals.” There are only four species of animals commonly raised for fur. “Twelve species” can only mean the first person to get inside United Farms may be face-to-face with little-seen species such as lynx and wolves.

We found the mega-farm buried in woods surrounded by residential housing developments, entirely invisible from the road. Unique to the farm is its level of fortification: the sheds sit behind two layers of barbed wire and chain link fence. The world is closing in on United Farms. They concealed the animals from view, but have not shielded the world from their shrieks, which disturb the quiet night of adjoining tree-lined neighborhoods, telegraphing their suffering to a world that would like to forget they exist at all.



### **The Coast**

Hidden in thick forests in the perpetual fog of the Oregon coast is the state's first, and oldest, cluster of mink farms. After years of only “rural route” addresses being published (coded addresses with locations known only to mail workers), in the last 18 months the movement had finally identified street addresses of Astoria's mink operations. A total of four farms were listed in close proximity in Svensen, one of which (Tynkila Mink) we found to be closed. Three to go.

Last year, FinalNail.com made public the location of a previously unknown satellite feed plant in Oregon for Washington-based Northwest Farm Foods. This vital lynchpin

in the fur industry was a significant discovery. Located on the waterfront on a dead-end road in south Astoria, we found the combination mink farm/feed supplier to be in full operation. The size of the buildings indicated there was more to this operation than mink. Along with the main Northwest Farm Foods production facility in Burlington, Washington, this location in Astoria is absolutely crucial to the survival of the Northwest's fur farms.

### **The A.L.F. Wins Again. And Again.**

The closure of the Oregon State University Experimental Fur Farm was widely publicized six months after the 1991 arson that destroyed its labs. But our movement is often more quick to claim successes than to verify potential failures, taking as fact what could just as easily be deliberate disinformation on the part of a farmer looking to continue their work off the radar. It was established at the outset of the Project that we would take nothing for granted, and accept as “closed” only that which we saw with our own eyes.

The address for the research farm had been reported to be off-campus at 1510 Brook Lane in Corvallis. We found the property was mostly grassland, with an abandoned poultry research lab and other barns that had fallen into disuse. Two long, gutted sheds, which had the general structure of mink sheds, were empty. After a survey of the property, we confirmed the absence of anything that could house mink. The vacant field and faint outline of buildings long since demolished illustrated the power of the only way to give freedom to animals and life to your words: action.

Still early in the afternoon, we surveyed our third A.L.F.-raided farm of the day: S&N Fur Farms. The owners of the farm felt safe enough to forgo even the most basic security precaution: a fence. The A.L.F. capitalized on this oversight when it released 150 mink in 2008. A low number on the average farm, but on a farm as small as S&N (we estimated its capacity at approx. 2,000 to 3,000 mink) such a release can be high-impact.

High impact it was. Every cage visible from our vantage point was confirmed to be empty. It seemed the Animal Liberation Front had shut down S&N Fur Farm.

## Of Farmers, Forests, and Fugitives

On a summer night over 10 years ago, I was driving laps around Drift Creek Road in Sublimity, Oregon, looking for a white piece of fabric in the road—our pre-established signal for “stop here.” I had dropped off a team of two to investigate the newly discovered Gardner Fur Farm. As I picked them up, the team spoke of finding a farm hidden at a distance from the road, just over a hill at the end of a gravel driveway. The most notable feature of the farm for our purposes: no house on site.

The Gardner Fur Farm—to our knowledge never again visited by activists—was overdue for a status update.

In 2009, I was back. In the shadow of the “Gardner Farm” sign, we pulled onto a narrow shoulder. I stepped 10 paces from the car to smell the air for the telltale scent of mink. In a moment, I heard the sound of tires on gravel from a neighboring driveway. Taking cover in the nearest bush, I watched a pickup approach Daisy, who was still in the car, and heard a stern exchange. Both cars drove in opposite directions.

For 8 hours I sat frozen in that bush across the street from the Gardner Fur Farm, watching the ensuing panic: police cars with sirens on flying up and down the rural road, and an ATV patrolling the area. At times feet from both, I crouched in silence. With no radio communication, and cell phones banned from the mission for security reasons, I could only speculate as to the fate of my companion. I spent the evening and night waiting for my rescue vehicle, and carefully digging a hole to bury the camera that held photos of nearly every fur farm in Oregon. At midnight, I had divested from all hopes of Daisy’s return, and began the 12 mile walk to civilization.

I walked most of the night, traversing dozens of farms, fleeing invisible stampeding cattle in pitch-black ranches, and sleeping for three hours in a field beside a Christmas tree farm. Fourteen hours after I left the Gardner Fur Farm, I arrived at the Silverton library. Drawing from the \$100 kept in my sock at all times as insurance for just such a situation, I made a phone call to a pre-established liaison, relaying my location. An hour later, Daisy arrived.



*overgrown sheds – Oregon State University*



*Lebanon, Oregon*



*Arritola Mink Ranch – Mount Angel, Oregon*

“I got arrested,” she said.

She told the story of stopping to wait for me near the farm, being accosted by neighbors, surrounded by multiple police cars, and being placed under arrest. They searched the vehicle without consent, searched it again, and upon finding my ID, realized I was on foot nearby and left to comb the countryside. In a case of “hiding in plain sight,” there was one place the police and farmer never looked: 10 feet from the site of the original confrontation. Twenty-two hours and many close calls after arriving in Silverton, with the Oregon fur farming community certain to be on high alert, we preempted all remaining Oregon farms and departed for Idaho.

## Fugitive-Status Redux

After the official conclusion to the Fur Farm Intelligence Project, five Oregon farms remained unconfirmed after the Gardner Fur Farm incident had derailed our course. In October, we broke from the data-sorting phase, and made the return drive to Silverton, Oregon.

We had changed cars to avoid recognition, while still establishing in advance that the stop was to be swift and streamlined: confirm the farm, dig up the camera, and get out.

We made one pass of the farm, and looked back to see a truck at a distance. The road was rural; I had seen fewer than 15 cars (excepting police and farmers) during my 8 hours on Drift Creek Road, so any vehicle was suspect. We pulled onto a dirt road and stopped to wait for the truck to pass. It didn’t.

The truck pulled off behind our parked car, stopped, stared, and continued on at a snail’s pace. This wasn’t someone on a Sunday drive. We spun around, returning to Drift Creek just as a second truck approached from the direction of the farm. We made a very unnatural 270-degree turn at a fork in the road. The truck followed suit. There was no room for interpretation, we were being followed.

After following at tailgate-distance for two miles, the truck returned in the direction of the farm. Regardless of the farmers who wanted to harm us, and the police who were likely en route, a return trip to retrieve the buried camera was non-negotiable. We agreed to forgo all finesse

and stealth for the only thing that mattered: speed. We looped back to the front of the farm, threw the car into park, and on hands and knees I dug up the camera from where it had been buried, exactly two months previous. It still worked.

We still hadn't visually confirmed animals at the Gardner Fur Farm, but we observed the next best evidence: paranoid vigilance that doesn't come from a farmer who just grows corn.



The newest farm in Idaho was the so-far unconfirmed Ball Brothers farm in Malad. Newspapers reported the farm had relocated from Utah to a site in Idaho housing 20,000 mink. This was our most remote destination yet. After miles on dirt roads, we arrived at the newly constructed Ball Brothers ranch, identifying the previously unknown address of 2726 N 5600 W, Malad, Idaho. There we found a farm so desolate it was absent an on-site house. The nearest home sat a half-mile away.

### The Hunted

Franklin is a town of 665, where animals outnumber people one hundred-fold. A large egg farm loomed on a hill overlooking the town. Hundreds of veal calves lined a dirt road. We didn't have to leave Highway 91 to see the Hobbs Fur Farm, which was as open as it was large. We took a single photo.

Looking for the library in Franklin's residential downtown, we noticed a single mink shed partially exposed in a backyard. Looping back for a second look, we noticed another, several houses down. And then another. After a cursory lap of downtown, Daisy and I had identified six micro-mink farms improbably positioned in very small backyards between crowded homes. Nowhere else would we see farms this small. We parked in a cul-de-sac to take a walk for further documentation. We wouldn't get far.



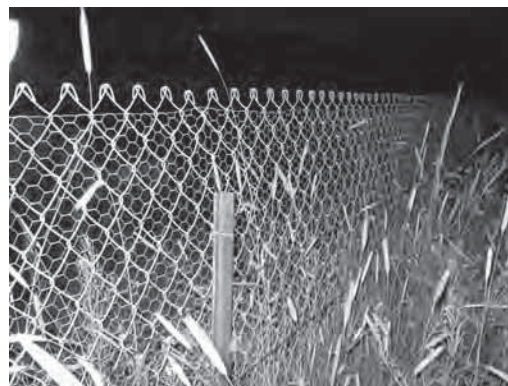
*Harris Mink Farm – Caldwell, Idaho*



*abandoned mink farm – Star, Idaho*



*Geary Fur Farm – Burley, Idaho*



*fence at Ball fur farm – Malad City, Idaho*

A red truck lurched to a stop ahead of our car, boxing us in. I hit the lock on the door, knowing whoever he was, he was there for us. A very overweight man charged the car, fists flailing. It was Hobbs.

“Y’all takin’ pictures of my mink farm?!” He pounded his fists on the glass. The standoff concluded with him reciting our plate number, pointing at me, and saying, “Yeah, I’ll be watchin’ you!”

No matter how severe a confrontation, the nature of our work allowed us the luxury of knowing we were at all times within the law. We continued on course, taking a closer look at the backyard mink operations. 20 minutes later, we spotted the red truck again, as Hobbs and a cohort sat outside a church. At the strict direction of our attorney, we made our move. Pulling beside the truck, I tapped the horn, and when they looked, we took their picture. Then we floored it.

They chased us. In clouds of dust, we tore through back roads into the barren hills above Franklin. They cornered us near the veal farm. The passenger leapt from Hobbs’ still-moving truck and lunged towards our car. Not content with the blood of mink, they wanted ours. We swerved to miss him, grazed through the gap between their truck and a ditch, and disappeared into the hills. We found sanctuary in the winding driveway of a hillside farm. 30 minutes later we emerged, and in looking for an alternate exit from town, we realized the labyrinth of dirt roads winding into the hills had only one exit—the way we came. They were waiting.

Unable to block our path completely, we squeezed past them en route to the highway one mile away. With their truck in chase, we emerged in the residential neighborhood as two police cars passed by at 60+ mph, sirens blaring. Our rear view mirror told the story of what was going to happen next. In a moment, we were on the side of Hwy. 91, detained by police.

The cop’s extortion attempt was simple: give him the camera, he said, or we were going to jail. I don’t give anything to police, and if I did, it wouldn’t be a camera with photos of every fur farm in Idaho. I told him to take me to jail. He returned to his car, returning again to ask for the camera. Those that can, do. Those that can’t, ask. On the advice of my lawyer, I

told him, I neither consented to a search nor questioning, and had nothing more to say.

“This is a farming community,” he explained. “There are people who have come here and let loose the mink and chickens, and I just want to make sure you’re not one of them.”

Local fur farmers were arriving at the scene en masse. They huddled with police, demanding our arrest. 20 minutes later, the cop came to the window with my ID.

“Mr. Young, I know who you are, and I know your history. You’re here to break into farms. You haven’t changed.”

He was half right.

“Next time they find you near their property, they’re going to shoot you.” He gave me a long, knowing look.

“And when we find your body, I still have to prove it was them who did it.”



It was the state where the lawless-old-west mentality was alive, well, and reigned in perpetuum. A state of ambiguous property lines, street names not found on any printed map, and diner patrons saying things like, “put it on my tab,” while adjusting their hats on their way out the door.

For our purposes, this off-the-grid culture resulted in wide gaps in fur industry intelligence. The USDA reported eight mink farms, but addresses for only four were known. Info on possible other locations was vague, such as the sparse address, “west of Harlowton,” for the unconfirmed Leppink Mink Ranch. Yet it was these farms where our work was most needed. If we didn’t confirm Montana’s fur farms, its remoteness made it unlikely anyone would.

**Campbell’s Mink Ranch.** While fireworks exploded overhead, we were celebrating our nation’s independence moving silently down Southside Road towards Campbell’s



*Henke Mink Ranch – Hobson, Montana*



*Henke Mink Ranch*



*Sky Halsey’s fox farm – Martinsdale, Montana*



*Rocky Mountain Fur Co. – Hamilton, Montana*

Mink Ranch. Mere yards from I-90, this farm was buried at the end of a driveway, deep in the woods. Elk grazed in the front yard, while squeals of mink could be heard from the back.

**Fraser Fur Farm.** East of downtown Ronan was in some ways the most ominous site of the Project. Fraser Fur Farm was rumored to imprison more lynx than live wild in the entire state. The information we collected was limited, but one month later we received the following anonymous report (along with photos):

*“In September 2009, word circulated that an investigation was sought for a fur industry exposé. The target was Fraser Fur Farm, largest wildcat farm in the country.*

*North of Missoula, tucked off a small road east of Ronan, are the cages that may imprison more lynx than exist in the wild in the entire state of Montana. Despite its significance, it is possible that no one from the animal liberation movement had ever seen the inside of Fraser Fur Farm. The only recorded account of animal liberators getting close came in a brief mention in Strong Hearts, Rod Coronado’s jailhouse zine. We set out for Ronan to verify the farm was open, confirm the species and numbers of animals, photograph the captives, and map the farm’s layout.*

*While most fur farms are easily accessed, Fraser’s was an exception. It was immediately clear why help was being sought—this was one of the few farms not visible from the road, unable to be investigated without breaching property lines, and once inside, incredibly difficult to gain access to animals without being in view of a house.*

*A pre-investigation nighttime visit found that the farm sat at the end of a dirt driveway off Terrace Lake Road. The first visit we stayed to the distant perimeter, familiarizing ourselves with the layout. The outline of cages and rattle of large animals hinted at what lay in the shadows, just out of sight. To obtain the documentation we sought, a nighttime visit was insufficient. We would have to access the farm mid-day.*

The next morning we parked in a residential neighborhood off Timberlane Road, at what we approximated was a point one mile due south of the farm. Our nighttime survey had found two houses on site, making any attempt at approaching from the front unsafe. Gunshots of hunter's echoed in the forest around us as we entered the woods. In a short time we found the faint outline of a trail, following it along a fence for one mile until we came into a clearing. Our shot-in-the-dark calculation had bore fruit; we were precisely at the rear of the Fraser Fur Farm.

At the only sliver of an angle not visible to either house, we emerged from the forest at the end of a long shed. We were met with the stare of a large, caged lynx. As majestic as imagined, the lynx seemed to have fallen through the cracks of time, pacing endlessly in its cage, waiting for the freedom just out of its reach.

We surveyed four sheds and one long row of lynx pens. Available information had put the animals held at Fraser as mink, bobcats and lynx. Four sheds housing mink were found to be empty, and it is possible the farm no longer imprisons mink. We were unable to confirm the presence of bobcats, but many sheds were not inspected. One long row of pens held approximately 50 lynx.

We documented the farm on video and with still photos. The documentation was submitted anonymously to aboveground contacts. We hope they will make these images—which may be the only existing photos of captive U.S. lynx—available to the public.

A final word on this farm; there would be no easy replacement, if any at all, for lost lynx breeding stock. Only one other farm in the U.S. (Gunnink Fur Farm) is confirmed to house lynx. More than any other animal raised for fur, the loss of irreplaceable lynx breeding stock would very likely be the end of this farm, and perhaps lynx farming in the U.S. Lastly, the person to liberate the captives of Fraser Fur Farm will have one historic accomplishment to their credit, that of doubling the wild lynx population in Montana.



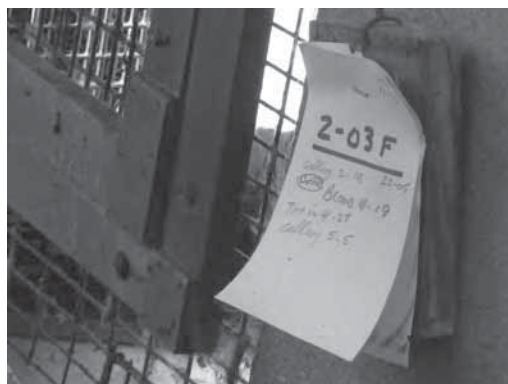
Fraser Fur Farm, rear gate



row of lynx cages



one of dozens of lynx at the Fraser Fur Farm



cage tag

Thousands of us. Only one Fraser Fur Farm. Do the math.

Anonymous”

**Henke Mink Ranch.** A seven-hour drive brought us to a region so desolate, the mere presence of an unrecognized car on the road would arouse suspicion. The information available was, “10 miles SW of Hobson.” A satellite map search revealed possible mink sheds on an unmarked road. Mink farms generally cluster, but this one stood alone in the vast central Montana prairie. At the location, we found oddly shaped sheds, but their unique structure obscured what was inside. We noted the farm’s address (167 Antelope Creek Road) and confirmed the presence of possible mink sheds.

**Rocky Mountain Fur Company.** A court document concerning the A.L.F.’s Operation Bite Back campaign in the early 1990s transcribed a letter reconstructed from typewriter ribbon seized during a search warrant. This letter allegedly solicited funds for a plan to burn down the Rocky Mountain Fur Company’s processing building, and explained the farm/processor’s importance to the Montana fur farming industry:

“After my investigation I discovered that all the fur farmers in Montana use the same company to prepare pelts for auction. The Huggans Rocky Mountain Fur Company is a building I have been in before. It is all wood, with no alarms and no close proximity to animals. The targeted building contains all the drying racks and drums used in pelt processing. If we could cause substantial damage to that equipment, we would cause a serious disruption in the pelting season, and also push the Huggan’s family (third generation trappers) into a position closer to bankruptcy.”

It is unknown if the Rocky Mountain Fur Company remains the sole pelt processor in Montana. However, the small farm itself, housing thousands of mink and fox, was found where it has been for years—just out of sight, a stone’s throw from Highway 93.



The terrain in the Northwest had been wooded and rural. We had eaten hash browns at diners next to the mayor, watched the “Frontier Days” parade from library windows, and turned heads writing postcards to prisoners in supermarket aisles at 2:00am.

Utah introduced a different flavor. In no other place than the area surrounding Lehi could you visit 16 mink farms in one day, and never be more than one mile from a strip mall. So pervasive is the industry in Utah County, factory-size farms merge seamlessly with dense clusters of McMansions. Fur farms are as innocuous in the landscape as a public tennis court. Local zoning ordinances allow farms to commingle with parks and single-family residences in open-armed harmony.

While Utah County broke records for fur industry pervasiveness, it took it even further with a bizarre county mandate: all farms were marked with a 6’ x 4’ sign reading “Ongoing Mink Operation.” To identify operational farms, binoculars or a trained nose were unnecessary. The location of every open farm was spelled out for us. Literally.

**The Death Star**

Since day one of the trip, one farm had been referred to only as “The Death Star.” Curiosity dictated it be our first stop in Utah. The Death Star was River Jordan Mink Ranch, reportedly the largest mink farm in the country.

The elevated view above the farm from Redwood Road gives the best view of its scale: over 100 sheds, housing 100,000 animals.

Common at every fur farm, factory farm, lab and slaughterhouse I’ve ever visited is an awe that never dulls with



*Jonsson & Sons Mink Ranch – Lehi, Utah*



*River Jordan Mink Ranch – Lehi, Utah*



*D&B Fur Farm – Peoa, Utah*



*G-W Fur Farm – Peoa, Utah*

repetition; how a place so significant, that has claimed so many lives, could be so accessible.

Two new farms were also discovered near Lehi. One hidden feet from Interstate 15, south of the Utah State Prison, on Pony Express Road. Closed in on three sides by parking lots and office buildings, the farm has responded with greater fortification than any other farm we’d seen; a 12-foot wall surrounded totally enclosed, corrugated metal sheds. The second farm, at the end of 8170 N in Lehi, was wedged between housing developments on all sides, and so well hidden it remained invisible until our fifth pass. Arrogantly, the property did not even have a live-in farmer.

**Twice Bitten**

Among the most significant pillars in the industry is the Fur Breeders Agricultural Cooperative. The unassuming building, on a quiet street in an industrial neighborhood in Sandy, just outside Salt Lake City, is the largest and oldest mink feed co-op in the country. After an attempted arson in 1991, and a very successful one in 1997, the building has been rebuilt and its work resumed. The complex consists of a large feed building, a gated back lot, and several portable-style buildings concealing the experimental fur farm to its south. Its operational status was never in question. We just wanted to see it. The best information gathered would not come from that day’s visual inspection, but from an employee on the day that followed....

**Tailing the Hand that Feeds**

The first stop north of Salt Lake City was Peoa, our first “problem child” town. Our attempts to confirm any of the four farms on our list were unsuccessful. At each one, we sat outside with binoculars, courting confrontation before declaring it “inconclusive” and moving on.

At a park a half block from G-W Fur Farm, we stopped and watched a semi-truck exiting the farm. I stared. There was only one regular delivery to farms: mink feed. As the truck approached too quickly for me to prepare, I angled the camera in its general direction and hit the button. Improbably, I had captured the blurry image of the truck, with a barely visible logo on the cab: “FBAC.” I didn’t pause to decode, I already knew: “Fur Breeders Agricultural Co-op.”

There was one vehicle that went to every fur farm in Utah, both known and unknown, and it was one block away, headed north.

“We’re following it,” I said.

We watched it pull into the next farm up the street, which we could now check off as open. The truck made it too easy. Every farm where the truck stopped could be confirmed as operational. And it would offer something of even greater intelligence value: a direct path to previously unknown farms.

While we waited for the truck to finish its delivery, we discussed the potential of this developing tactic.

“Following the truck is out of the cards,” Daisy said. “We need to get inside.”

I stared at her blankly.

“Hitchhiking, Peter. I’m going hitchhiking.”

Without pausing for discussion, she seized a camera, notepad, canvas bag, and said goodbye.

### **The Utah Hitchhiking Experiment**

Daisy took up post 100 yards up Highway 32. My eyes moved between her and the farm’s driveway, where the truck would emerge. Less than two minutes later, it did. Daisy put out her thumb. The plan rested on one variable outside our control: the driver had to pick her up.

He did.

Regardless of the wisdom or safety of the plan, we had now irreversibly entered into the present circumstance. Daisy was in a truck with the man who delivered feed to over half of the farms in Utah. I followed. Heading north, I added up every way this didn’t rise to the standards of a “plan”. We had no cell phone contact, no S.O.S. signal, and if I lost them, no rendezvous point. The only semblance of cohesion in this hasty venture was the suggestion I stammered to Daisy as she exited the car, “Copy his delivery list.”

She was in one-on-one conversation with among the most valuable intelligence resources in the Utah fur industry. If her questions were calculated, the ride would yield more insight than a hundred issues of



*abandoned fur farm – Henefer, Utah*



*J & G Mink Ranch – Highland, Utah*



*Wardell Fur Farm – Enterprise, Utah*



*Fur Breeders Agriculture Co-op – Logan, Utah*

Fur Rancher. If she maintained her cover.

I tailed from a distance to Wanship, where they stopped at the Ovard Mink Farm. Later, Daisy would describe what she was learning.

The driver’s name was Stan. He was a driver for the Sandy plant. He delivered to approximately 30 farms, from Utah County to Coalville. He left the plant each night at 1:00am, and finished his route at 11:00am. He had been driving the same route for 17 years.

I watched them pull away 10 minutes later. The truck exited I-80 in Coalville, where after getting caught at a light, I lost the truck. I drove countless loops around town, looking for it at each of Coalville’s six mink farms. Three hours later, I drove past Black Willow Mink for the 4th time, and abandoned hope. Moments later on Main Street, in my peripheral vision, I glimpsed arms flailing from the sidewalk. It was Daisy.

We took up post in the lobby of Coalville’s only hotel where she told me the story. We had caught him near the close of his shift, she said, and Coalville was the end of his route. After lunch, he dropped her off and returned south.

“And when he dropped me off,” she said, “he gave me this.” She held up a \$20 bill.

He told her to buy food. He didn’t say for who. The fur industry had just unknowingly donated \$20 to the jail commissary fund of accused A.L.F. members BJ and Alex. Their alleged crime? Liberating mink from a farm on Stan’s route.

*Continued on page 27*

## Mink Capital U.S.A.

The fur farming capital of the country is now Morgan, Utah, having dethroned Medford, Wisconsin in the 1990s. We confirmed 13 active farms in the town's core and outlying areas, among them a farm so deep in the heart of downtown you could very nearly reach out and touch a mink from the parking lot of Goldenwest Credit Union. Within days, Morgan newspapers reported farmers had been noticing suspicious activity, including people, "seen taking pictures of mink ranches."

## Cops, Curses, and Quicksand

Later, while William "BJ" Viehl and Alex Hall were in jail nearby on Animal Enterprise Terrorism charges, we were in Hyrum, Utah, at the farm that was the subject of Count Two in their indictment. The charge alleged an attempted raid. After reviewing the discovery in their case, I knew the totality of the evidence was being vegan while sitting in a car outside Blackridge Farms. Exactly what we were doing.

We took several photos and went to turn around on a dirt road behind the farm. In perceiving it as a "dirt road," we had been too optimistic. It was a mud swamp. A few pumps of the gas made it clear: we were stuck. As the case of BJ and Alex had shown, there are places where your presence is suspicious. And then there are places where it is arrestable. A dirt road 30 yards from rear gate of a mink farm in Utah was the latter. If there is a curse on surveillants of this farm, it now had its third and fourth victims.

By rule and practice, ours was a 100% legal trip. But we acknowledged in the eyes of rural police and hostile farmers, it at times had the appearance of something else. When outside fur farms, an "arrest first, ask question later" police response was not only possible, it was probable. When such a confrontation was felt to be imminent, we had an agreed-upon protocol. One of us would announce, "purge the car." The other would put the map binder under the seat, the video camera in the dash, the digital camera and binoculars in the console, and cover any food package with the word "vegan" on it; then we would brace for the worst.

This was one of those times. After cleansing the car, we reclined, waiting for



*Welcome to Morgan, Utah*



*Dawson Mink Farm – Morgan, Utah*



*Round Valley Mink Ranch – Morgan, Utah*



*Blackridge Farms – Hyrum, Utah*

whatever was going to happen, to happen.

Minutes later, a pickup truck pulled up. A man got out, approaching slowly.

"Now, now... what is going on here?"

We were, I told him, prospective students visiting Utah State University.

"Well..." He sighed heavily. "...if that's your story."

He threw me a rope.

"Tie this to the back of your car."

He pulled us from the mud. Back on solid ground, I untied the rope, thanked him, and got in the car.

"Let's get out of Hyrum. Fast," I said.

I went to shift, just as a knock came at my window. I rolled it down.

"One more thing," he said. "You aren't mixed up with those..." he stared into the distance with dramatic pause.

"...animal rights people, are you?"

We shook our heads. Then asked why.

"See that right there?" He pointed directly ahead.

"That's a mink farm. They've had problems with people coming here and turning them loose." We nodded with feigned interest.

"The other night I found the farmer walking through this field with his shotgun. He was looking for animal rights people. You're lucky I saw you before he did."

We drove away. Thinly veiled threats on our lives tally: now at two.

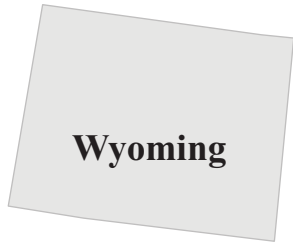
## Lockdown

Every fur farmer in the region would be on high alert. But we had more farms to see than time, and any break for the alarm to quiet was impractical. We continued north to Logan.

We confirmed several more farms in the outlying areas, and at night returned to Logan for our last stop, the Jenson Fur Farm. Just as we were about to pull over

beside the farm, we noticed a car with its lights off parked at a suspicious angle in an adjacent residential neighborhood, aimed directly at the farm's gate. I kept driving, waited 20 minutes, and passed again. The car was still there. It was an unmarked Crown Victoria, with an occupant. The police were staking out Logan's fur farms.

We left the state.



It was fur farms like WYO Furs which exemplified our mission. Its address in Eden, Wyoming (pop. 97), has appeared in all three editions of The Final Nail, but being so remote it had never been visited or confirmed. A several-hour drive confirmed the farm was no longer in business. By all available farm lists, we confirmed that Wyoming was now void of fur farms.



We stood at a barbed wire fence in Scribner, in high winds, listening to a tortured cacophony of howling animals echoing from the metal sheds of John Smeal's fox farm. It was the only fur farm we found open in Nebraska, and the largest fox farm we would see all summer.



In 2006, prosecutors agreed to drop state charges for a mink release to which I had already plead guilty in federal court, under one condition: that I never return to South Dakota. Ever. Under threat of prison, South Dakota was barred from the investigation, while the farm I was charged with (Turbak Mink Ranch) was put out of business. We hoped the Fur Farm Intelligence Project's financial backers considered the trade an acceptable one.



*Underwood Farm – Fredericksburg, Iowa*



*Hawkeye Mink Co-op – Jewell Iowa*



*Perrin & Sons Fur Farm – Cherokee, Iowa*



*abandoned mink farm – Peterson, Iowa*



By every measure, Iowa is the hardest hit state in the A.L.F.'s war on the fur industry. It has the most farms hit (eight) and most numbers of animals released (27,401).

In continuing the update of A.L.F.-visited farms, we surveyed old satellite images to locate the Scott Nelson Mink Ranch near Jewell (the A.L.F. communiqué listed a street, but not a complete address). This farm was raided twice in one week, after which the farmer announced the farm would be forced to close. Whether this was a genuine admission of defeat or a lie to deter future raids had never been confirmed.

We located the site of the farm on a dirt road northeast of downtown Jewell. Where the farm once stood was now a field of corn. The farm had been closed by the A.L.F. Now passed from history, the only traces left are blurry satellite images, and if you look closely, a break in the grass marking the turnoff that once led to the sheds of the Scott Nelson Mink Ranch.

### **The Lost Farm**

For years I was tormented by a reoccurring nightmare. Driving down a dirt road in Iowa, I pull over, as though directed by an unseen hand. The compulsion brings me to push through a wall of thick roadside bramble. I come to a small clearing, with a single row of fox pens. The pens lay just feet from the road, concealed by thick, dead foliage. The foxes stare up with looks of both anticipation and betrayal. Looks asking how so many people had passed by within 10 feet and never seen them, and never stopped to help.

So vivid were those images, I spent my drives in Iowa looking for that farm. My eyes never on the road, always to the side, afflicted with the fear I would pass this undiscovered farm of my nightmare, hidden feet from the road, never noticing their eyes staring back, waiting.

We never found that fox farm. But the vigilance it inspired brought us another. Set back from the road, on Highway 9 in Osage, I glimpsed a fox pen in a side yard. We pulled over and approached the fence. At midnight, the only sounds were

the crackling of the electric fence and the howls of hundreds of caged foxes. It wasn't the farm of my nightmare. It was the farm of a nightmare that I had yet to have.

Then came the losing streak.

### **The Iowa Mink Farmer Mobilization**

We had taken over 400 photos of farms across the West. And many of the hurried photos, when reviewed, showed a farmer with mouth agape staring back. Despite our efforts, we were being regularly seen outside farms, taking photos, counting sheds, and fooling no one while taking "after dinner walks" down dirt roads where no one goes for a stroll.

Most farmers submit any such suspicious activity to the Fur Commission USA's "Incident Report" in the "members only" portion of the FCUSA website which functions as a nationwide log of suspicious fur farm activity. The log lists thousands of entries going back to the mid-90s: transcripts of threatening emails, license plate numbers of cars passing farms a little too slowly, descriptions of trespassers wearing night-vision goggles being chased from farms, and even tail numbers from low passing planes. A review of any page of the Incident Report leaves one thing undebatable: fur farmers are paranoid, and spend their lives in fear of the Animal Liberation Front.

We weren't the A.L.F., but after our third day in Iowa, it was clear that Iowa's farmers were waiting for us. Repeatedly, as we moved through eastern Iowa's succession of fox farms, we would barely raise our camera before finding a car gunning its engine, pulling from the farm, and chasing us. Iowa's farms had been raided so many times; farmers didn't run to their computers first, they ran to their cars.

A yellow Datsun tailed us across town when we were seen photographing sheds in Mystic. After losing the car, we found it again, now joined by a police car on the shoulder of Highway T14. Not seeing us after our well-timed U-turn, the police car turned on its lights and sped south. In Union, after three photos, a car left the Andres & Sons Fur Farm and followed us north on Highway D67. And we hadn't been out of the car long enough to take a photo of Schmuecker Fox Farm before a farmer boxed us in, pulled open our car



*Medford, Wisconsin – "Home of the Raiders"*



*Central Mink Foods – Medford, Wisconsin*



*Halbach Mink Ranch – New Holstein, Wisconsin*



*Zimbal Minkery – Oostburg, Wisconsin*

door, and leaned in with the words, "I know what you're doing. And I have your license plate." All in one day.

Our final day in Iowa brought a reversal of mood. The last stop of the trip—Hidden Valley Fur Farm, raided by the A.L.F. in 1998—was found with its sheds gutted, and a mountain of empty fox cages seen decaying at the rear.

Day after day, we were looking for farm prisoners in the eye, only to walk away. Leaving every one of them was like breaking a promise.



Wisconsin has more fur farms than any other state in the country. Before concluding our nine days there, we would lay eyes on the prisons and cemeteries of over one million mink.

The farms in Wisconsin were massive on a scale we had not seen before. Northwest Mink Ranches, Brecke Farms, Patrick Fur Farm and others each imprisoned tens of thousands of animals.

Klinger Farms was once among the oldest mink farms in the country. At the address in Chippewa Falls, we found instead a small country market swarmed by a Saturday crowd. With satellite images clearly showing 14 sheds at this address, we slipped around the back of the building, believing the benign storefront to be concealing something much more sinister. And behind the store, we found 14 sheds. Each one imprisoning hundreds of decorative potted plants. We returned to the front and entered the store. The address of the former fur farm was now an all-vegetarian farmers market.

On our list of new data was a cluster of farms in the town of Polar. We had addresses for three farms, and satellite images revealing two more in close proximity. These now-confirmed mink and fox farms stand as the largest cluster of new farms of the Project.

Plymouth was home to three farms on our list, and one of the largest feed suppliers. After a successful arson destroyed United Feeds in 1999, the president vowed to

rebuild. And he did. We made one pass on Highway 67 and knew the next nighttime saboteurs to visit United Feeds would find it a greater challenge than their predecessors: the buildings were rebuilt entirely of metal.

Most days in Wisconsin the number of farms we found closed was greater than those found open. Altogether, we confirmed the closure of over 30 Wisconsin farms.

Of A.L.F.-visited farms: Otts Mink Ranch: open. Smieja Fur Farm: open. Zimbal Mink Ranch: open. Krieger's Fur Farm: open (Krieger may have found evidence his farm was approached from the north when it was raided in 1999: a 15-foot tall barricade of cages has been constructed along the farm's rear). And there was one more, saved for last.

### Closure

Half of my two-year prison sentence was served for what happened in 1997 at 5226 Perkins Street, in Medford, Wisconsin. Ed Dittrich awoke the morning of October 25th to find his fence stripped away, and 2,500 of his mink gone. Among the several farm raids I was accused of, my lawyer had speculated this farm was

hand picked for the subject of my plea bargain because the farm had been forced to close, and the FBI wanted a body. The alleged closure had never been confirmed.

The farm had been chosen that night solely because of the shed's distance from the farmer's house. That night we watched 2,500 mink disappear into the countryside, as we, too, made our escape—every one of us on the run.

13 years later, I had come full circle. We turned off Hwy. 13 onto Perkins Street, and one mile later came to a stop in front of a field. The farm was gone.

We drove away in silence. Just past the farm, in my peripheral vision, I noticed motion in the grass. I braked abruptly for a small animal darting from the field, and watched it scurry across the road.

It was a mink.

For liberation,

*Peter Young*

### 212 Farms Later...

It had been two months of 16-hour days, dirt roads, and the ever-present sight of imprisoned animals. After the last Wisconsin farm, we made a slow return trip to Seattle.

In the weeks that followed, we circulated a list of unverified farms and asked anyone with information to submit it anonymously. Over the next month, we received several detailed reports.

As word of the project spread, more information came in. The most salient was a box of internal fur industry documents described only as being obtained "legally." The memos, invoices and other documents provided many of the addresses that are published in a concluding document.

The complete culmination of the Fur Farm Intelligence Project is The Blueprint. This document includes every piece of data obtained during the 12-state investigation. Among the contents: \*Updated state-by-state fur farm list \*Closed farms database \*Updated industry research farms list \*Smallest farms list \*Updated feed suppliers list. And more...

The Blueprint can be downloaded at:  
[www.voiceofthevoiceless.org](http://www.voiceofthevoiceless.org)



*Peter at the site of the now-closed Dittrich Minkery*

## addendum.

*The following are two among many anonymous reports received after putting out a call for information related to the Fur Farm Intelligence Project.*



### **USDA Fur Bearer Research Facility Pullman, Washington**

“When the call went out soliciting the location of the USDA Fur Bearer Research Facility in Pullman, Washington, we decided to attempt to locate the research farm.

Washington State University’s John Gorham is one of the largest recipients of research grants from the Fur Commission USA, and holds the dishonorable title of one of the world’s foremost mink researchers. Gorham is still very much in business, and remains a key figure in keeping the U.S. fur industry alive.

In August 1991, the A.L.F. ransacked Gorham’s offices and freed seven coyotes and six mink from the research farm. The A.L.F.-authored publication Memories of Freedom—an anonymous account of every (claimed) action in Operation Bite Back—offers only clues to the farm’s whereabouts. The farm was surrounded by barbed wire, located on the “outskirts” of campus, and surrounded by grassland; the farm is “on a road to the local airport.” With little information to work with, we made the long drive to Pullman.

We quickly narrowed the area that could potentially house the research farm to the various research animal pens along Airport Road, on WSU’s eastern edge. Along Airport Road we found grizzly bears, sheep, goats, cows and numerous other animals confined to small pens.

At night, we explored the dirt roads and paths along Airport Road on foot. In four

hours, after inspecting numerous sheds, pens and barns, we had narrowed potential sites for the mink research farm to two locations:

- Two sheds of empty cages behind 1040 NE Airport Road.
- A fenced outdoor facility off a dirt road adjacent to Wilson Road.

Evidence pointing to the former was its location close to the only known address associated with mink research at WSU, “1040 NE Airport Rd.” The sheds approximated the design of mink sheds; however, the feeding devices on the cages appeared to more closely resemble those for birds than mink. And there was no grassy hill above the sheds, as described in Memories of Freedom. Nothing else found near this address was likely to house mink.

Our strongest suspicions fell on a heavily secured facility tucked away a quarter mile from Airport Road. The use of binoculars failed to reveal what was inside, but large animal pens were visible, along with a large barn. We left to do more research and return the following night for a closer look.

The next morning we reviewed old campus maps in the library, and older archived satellite images. One thing stood out: images from the early 1990s show two long sheds in an area inspected the night before, where there was now a vacant field. Their long and narrow form would make it unlikely they had housed anything other than mink. Comparing new and old images revealed something further: While the sheds had been demolished, the fenced area under suspicion from the night before had been greatly expanded. Had WSU consolidated its wildlife research into one secured facility after the 1992 A.L.F. raid?

At night we made the hike back to the site, which was hidden off a dark, unmarked dirt road (“Antelope Trail,” we later learned), branching east off Airport Road. Unlike every other animal facility off Airport Road, this one was heavily secured, with a high barbed-wire fence, motion-sensor spotlights and several video cameras. At the rear of the facility, we found numerous animal pens. When our eyes adjusted to the darkness, we found ourselves face to face with deer, confined in small pens. We spent a few minutes sharing the silence of the night with these animals who stared at us from behind two layers of fencing. We moved

towards the most suspicious portion of the site, the low-lying sheds in the NE corner, where we suspected mink were housed. The obscured siding told us whatever was inside was not domesticated enough to live in a totally enclosed structure, but was something the animal’s captors wanted shielded from view. We were within 20 feet of the pens when, from inside, a red flashlight began moving towards us. We vanished into the grasslands, just short of an answer as to what lay inside the sheds at 3055 Antelope Trail.

The following day we returned in daylight for photos, which are being submitted with this report.

Although inconclusive, evidence indicates that 3055 Antelope Trail is the most likely location for the mink imprisoned at Washington State University.

Anonymous”



### **Palmer Erickson fur farm Jewell, Iowa**

“After receiving a request for more information on the Palmer Erickson fur farm, we entered the property in the middle of the day and compiled this brief report. Enclosed, please find photos of the animals and layout of the farm. This is the last fur industry target in the Town of Jewell untouched by the A.L.F. Inside the Erickson farm, which is not visible from Saratoga Avenue, we found many thousands of both black and white mink and approximately 100 foxes held in pens at the rear of the property. We would like to point out Erickson’s house is located quite a distance from the mink and fox pens. We were able to freely move about this farm during the day, an effort that would be made even easier under darkness. While we failed in our duty to save these animals, we hope these photos inspire others to act with their hearts and bring this sick enterprise to an end.”