tools

You're down at your local military base, ready for a spot of disobedience… but there's always a fence in your way. DFROIOW (the Democratic Front for the Removal of Obstacles In Our Way) presents this practical guide to fences in their many guises and how to overcome them.

Fences: the definitive illustrated guide...

Contemporary fences, as we all know, are designed to prevent people from entering *forbidden* places. However, some activists take one look at a 5m-high weld-mesh fence topped with spanking new razor wire, and think anything from "Oh yes, I'll just pop over that one before breakfast and wave a banner quickly while I'm on the top", to "Lets nick a Humvee and just trash the sucker" (slightly more expedient perhaps?). The approach we takes depends not only on our personal philosophies about "criminal" damage and whether we mind going to prison for Taking and Driving Away, but rather more pragmatically it depends on *why* we want to go over/under/through the fence in question.

For example, there are those who feel that the act of climbing over fences or cutting through them is merely an annoying "obstacle-related detail"; that getting into the base in order to bear witness/occupy something/sabotage something is the real aim. Then we have the examples of Snowballers and some Trident Ploughshares 2000 activists cutting fences for purely symbolic reasons, or to create court cases where international humanitarian law can be aired through the domestic "justice" system.

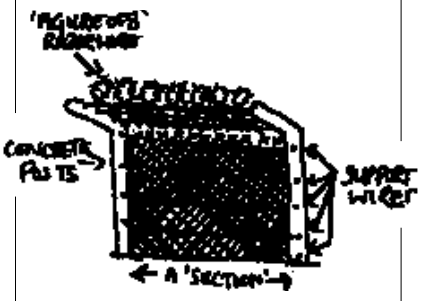
Breaching security

Of course some people love cutting fences just for the hell of it (oh yes!). It costs the military money, and if you do it sneakily it means you breach security without them noticing (till it's too late!). Aside from ram-raiding or landing a light plane on their runways, cutting fences provides the most expedient method of getting the most people into an establishment. Cutting fences can also enable some less physically able activists to participate in the kind of actions that would prove impossible if we had to scale a 5m fence. (Let's face it — the people who can actually do this kind of death-defying climbing are in the minority.)

A basic checklist for deciding on your method of entry could be as follows:

- *Why* are you entering this establishment?
- Is your action overt or covert?
- Do you care if you get nicked for "going equipped" or criminal damage?
- How many of you are there?
- What fences/obstacles does the establishment present to you?
- What equipment do you have access to/how much cash?
- Who is in this group (or are you on your own?) and what does everyone think?
- Is it day or night?

Next there are various different types of fences or obstacles to be considered…



Chainlink

This is cheap. Generally covered in black or green plastic coating (although older types may be bare/rusty), the wire inside is approximately 5 to 8mm in diameter and is made of fairly malleable steel. The wire runs vertically and is bent in such a way that it is easily interlinked. (This is presumably why it's called chainlink!) The wire usually comes in panels 3m high by 4m wide and is tension strung between concrete posts with three to five supporting wires running horizontally between the posts to which the fence panel (or "section" as it is commonly called) is attached.

However, this type of fencing is not massively strong or stable. Although held under tension it still has a lot of "give" in it. This type of fence is almost always topped with barbed or razor wire and can support vibration-activated sensor wires (if so desired by the establishment concerned).

Cutting chainlink

Don't buy expensive boltcutters unless you have a cunning accomplice who will take them away and stash them for you, or unless it's the crime of the century and warrants such expenditure — the chances are you will lose them one way or another. However you may be able to "untwizzle" fences either by cutting one strand of fence weeks in advance of your action (so no boltcutters needed on the day), or by carrying a large coin which can be inserted into the end of the fence (where two strands are twizzled together) and used as a lever to untwizzle a strand. (The coin method has been used very successfully on many occasions — at Aldermaston, Sellafield, Greenham, etc.)

If you do need to cut on the job the fastest way we've found is as follows:

Cut vertically first — on the same wire strand on every other diamond — the pieces then fall away (if you want to really screw the forensics around, get a cunning accomplice to remove these pieces so there's even less evidence of your "crime"). Make sure your vertical cut is tall enough and well placed. Most chainlink has support wires running at approximately 0.75m, 1.5m and 2.5m from the ground. Start your cut immediately above the bottom (0.75m) support wire, go up to the next one (at 1.5m) and cut through that one, with a further three to five cuts above. This makes it possible to get in (and out?) without crawling about or having to

Demonstrating the garden hoe and rope technique to police at the Burghfield atomic weapons plant, England. Note the bare feet. PHOTO: DFROIOW

climb up first. However, some people with shorter legs, wheelchair users and others with mobility issues will find a 1.5m starting height totally inappropriate — so use your heads and plan in advance what will be most appropriate for you and your accomplices.

Then cut horizontally. You need to cut *each* wire strand — one at a time — but probably you only need to cut 4 to 6 at right angles to, and at the top of, your vertical cut. Then stick your foot into the hole in the opposite corner to where you cut horizontally, and stretch the hole diagonally. This will make the hole loads bigger and baggier (by up to 50 percent!)

Climbing chainlink

Fence climbing is a matter of technique and faith — it's essential to have both. Beginners need to practise on gates, which are usually much easier, though they may wobble! (See below for gate info.)

The masochist's method — needs no tools

Although it increases vulnerability, in some ways it is best to climb with bare feet so that your toes can provide purchase. There is also no possibility of getting socks, etc snagged on the barbed wire — which can overbalance you, or get you stuck.

Use bare hands, or weightlifters' fingerless leather gloves, again so that you cannot get snagged, and because flexible fingers are essential.

Use your fingers and toes to climb up the fence next to a concrete support post. Hook the leg furthest from the post over the top near (outer) barbed wire strand, avoiding the barbs if possible. Then use the concrete post overhang to pull/lever yourself up onto the post, with your hooked leg providing leverage. Leaning on the concrete post use the other hand (left leg, left hand) to reach through the barbed and razor wire to catch a further (inside) strand of barbed wire — usually the top or middle strand.

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Useful tools

- Jacks — good for getting under gates and wooden/metal fences where there's a gap.
- Blow-torch (ooo-er, vicar!).
- Ladders — aluminium are the lightest. Limited trials with bunk-bed ladders which have hooks on the end (for hooking onto fences) have had varying success.
- Power tools — the ultimate fantasy action…
- Oxyacetylene cutting torches.
- Bolt-cutters (30–60cm rubber handled — keep them well oiled).
- Hacksaws (big ones and little ones).
- Crowbars — useful for levering. If you want to go under a bit of chain link (if it is not concreted into the ground as much of it is), you pull the fence up from the bottom, using the crow-bar for extra leverage.
- Iron bars, shelf brackets or G-clamps — for temporary steps on weldmesh
- Hoes. Yes, hoes.
- Coins, or other small solid metal bars (for untwizzling).
- Bits of rope
- Contractors' ladders. Sometimes they leave ladders lying around inside their premises when there's construction work going on (yes, this is true). One climber nips in, pushes the ladder through the gap at the side of the gate. (It gets stuck. Then she nips in, and, can you believe it, finds another ladder, and this time cleverly pushes it *over* the gate). Then you all climb the gate, and another fence, and another fence, and then the cops come along and threaten to confiscate *your* ladder!

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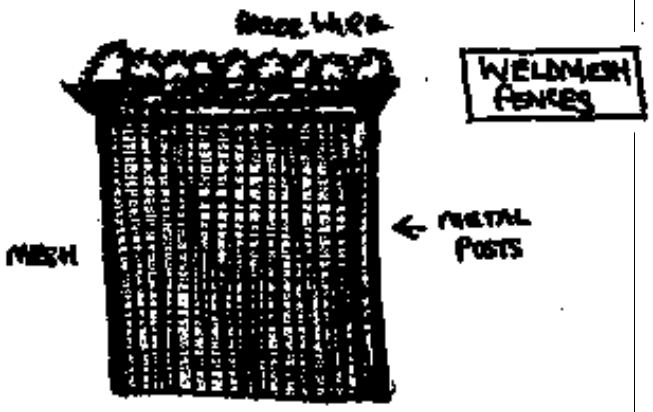
Fences: *continued from page 35*
Using the left leg to push, the left hand to pull, and the right arm to pull/lever, haul yourself more or less onto the concrete post. With luck your left foot is now on top of the mesh fence (beware the top strand of barbed wire which is often run along the top of the mesh).

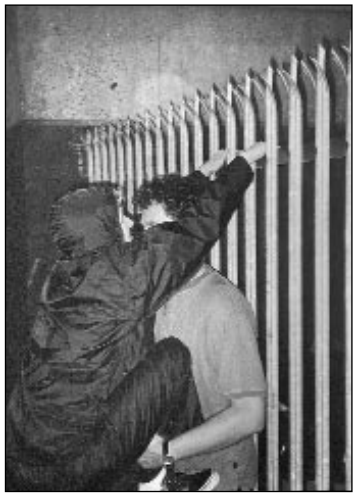
Balance on that leg, supporting yourself on the concrete post and, still pulling with the left hand on the far strand of barbed wire, pull up the right leg to the top of the mesh fence. Then twist to the right and wedge your bottom onto the concrete post for a sit and a breather/fag/banner-wave whilst assessing the next step! (This depends on the pattern of the razor wire figures of eight: sometimes you can't sit because your legs are different sides of a razor wire coil!) With experience and luck all this is done in one manoeuvre — really!

Through the razor wire

If you are very slim and lucky the next stage is relatively easy. You need to slide down the inside of the V,



through the coils of razor wire and next to the post. Balancing on top of the fence, supported by your left hand on the top of the far barbed wire strand, and the right probably on the post, you need to align your body in a coil of the razor wire. You get there by stepping your legs through the top of the coil (ie you are bent double, since your hands are lower than the top of the razor wire figure of eight join).



Accessories

- Handbag — preferably with matching shoes and hat — for all your kit.
- Walking stick — useful for winging women over ditches with.
- Tent-poles to telescopise your bolt cutters (they have to be strong ones and fix very tightly over the bolt cutters), and to prop the razor wire up with.
- Chocolate (always).
- Special forces type utility jacket with oodles of pockets and useful bits.
- Get-away driver (or cyclist with panniers).
- A cunning plan (that's the most important bit of all).

Turning towards the concrete post, your back to the inside of the base, you slide through the barbed wire V and razor wire figure of eight. You *will* get hitched on the wire, so go gingerly, but be prepared to tug your clothes hard to free them. If your flesh hits a barb, remember to back up to unhook yourself! Your weight will be on your toes in the fence, and your hands on the barbed wire, and then the fence as you descend.

If you become totally trapped by your clothes, trust to gravity. Align your body as straight as possible, unhook what you can, then let gravity take over… But be prepared to have to bounce and use your body weight to tug yourself free, and then catch hold of the fence so you don't fall.

On the inside of some fences are horizontally strung sensor wires — make sure you don't stick your bum into them as you slide down close to the inside of the fence. Stand on firm ground, take a deep breath, then lie down and roll under the bottom wire. Hey presto, you're through!

If you are unable to slide through the bottom of the V, you will have to go out over the metal inner leaning arm of the V; if additionally there are sensor wires hung out on brackets from the inside of the fence you must avoid them too!

To manoeuvre over the inner V if there are also razor wire figures of eight might be impossible. This is why it's preferable to slide down through the bottom of the V. If there is no razor wire then you need to manoeuvre yourself into the V of the concrete post leaning out, and the metal post leaning in. Face the outside, bum to the base. You now have to get a knee onto the top inner strand of barbed wire, or possibly each knee each side of the metal post. Cling onto the metal post, with your body above the post and swing the right leg off the barbed wire, and down the fence. Your weight is now supported by your arms clinging round the metal post, and on your right leg, whilst the left leg is moved down off the barbed wire — then just climb down.

Going Under

Find a boggy area or a place where the fence is on a slope (much more scope here). Prise the fence away from the ground (may take a bit of effort — better if there's a few of you) and use sticks/tentpoles/wrecking bars to lever and prop it up whilst you roll under. Shovels may be of use in digging out a hollow to give yourselves more room.

Weldmesh

Weldmesh is, as its name implies, welded mesh. It consists of thicker steel vertical supports placed about 10cm apart, with thinner steel horizontal bars running across the whole section at about 1cm apart. This is very strong and stable fencing; each section is riveted or welded onto a sturdy metal support post. It is invariably topped with razor wire

and in most cases has either vibration sensors attached directly to it or supports sensor wires running on either side. On first impression, weldmesh presents a fairly implacable face.

Cutting

This is fine if you've got a week, and there are no cameras, sensors or cops. You need a very strong single-bladed hacksaw, or small-headed long-handled super-sharp bolt-cutters (diamond tipped are the best, but very expensive), or (and we haven't tried this *yet*) oxyacetylene cutting torches or power tools.

The best bolt-cutter technique is to cut vertical strands in a horizontal

line (you can also do this with a very good hacksaw). This is the top of your "door" so put it at the right height. Then (and this is much more difficult), cut horizontals down from one corner — once you've cut a few, you can use the hack-saw much more quickly). If your party is small (petite, as opposed to only having a few mates) then you can pull across the triangle and squeeze in. Otherwise, you then have to cut across the bottom of your "door" until you can pull it back enough for invaders to get through. Alternatively, if you have two cutters, then they can cut the bottom, while you cut the top.

Limited tests have been carried out in heating the weldmesh first with a blow-torch — apparently it's easier to cut. However, this is a fairly stupid activity to do at night.

Climbing

Weldmesh is pretty impossible to climb without tools. One regular weldmesh climbing activists' preferred tool is a three-pointed garden hoe, with a rope hung off the middle prong (carrying it is extremely embarrassing, since it looks lethal!). Hook the hoe securely over the fence, possibly over a strand of barbed wire, then follow the procedure as set out under "chainlink climbing" above.

There will be a narrow metal post on the inside of the weldmesh which provides a very narrow ladder — use it!

Using home-made steps

Bits of flat iron or steel as steps to get to the top of the fence have been used successfully at least once. The steel strips should be about 250mm long by 50mm wide by 6mm thick. Bend them in the middle to form a right angle. (Perhaps ultra-light-weight activists could get away with using shelf brackets?) You need three or four of these pieces. Put each through the fence and tilt it so that one side is hard up against the inside of the fence. On your side, it sticks out like a step — which you climb up. On the other side of the fence you tilt the steps the other way and climb down.

Going under

If you have time, dig a hole under the fence and cover it with a few planks of wood and then either gravel or earth on top so it blends in. You can now use it whenever you need it.

If weldmesh is joined to chainlink you can undo the bits of wire that join them together and then pull the fences apart.

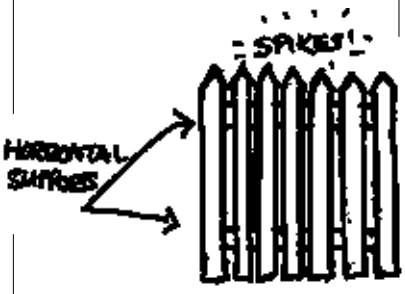
Wooden fences

Wooden fences can be easily dispensed with using ladders or even bunk ups (see the photos for the Swedish technique).

Some are easier to get out of than into (eg chestnut paling, which has two nicely placed horizontal supports on the inside — your legs have to be quite long). Many wooden fences are not actually set into the ground so there may be scope for digging away underneath and sliding under. Ladders are by far the easiest although there may be a place for knotted ropes, three-pronged hoes, grappling hooks, etc. Try them out and let us know!

Metal fences

These are extremely horrible and annoying, especially the ones with curly horrid spikes on the top. Generally they consist of a series of 2.5m or taller by 15cm wide galvanised steel strips held in vertical rows with two or three horizontal steel supports either welded or riveted on. Again ladders are probably the easiest. However, if there is room, it may be possible to insert a car jack under the bottom horizontal support and jack a portion of the fence up, up and away! Unfortunately most metal fences have horizontal supports about 15cm off the ground and are well and truly concreted in. Same possibilities for ropes, etc as for wooden fencing, but watch out for the spikes on top! No special advice really — just be careful because this fencing has no "give" in it and if you get spiked you'll probably be going to hospital!



Razor/barbed wire

Its a pain! Here are some tips on what to do with it:

- Carpets;
- Gloves;
- Cut it (diversity of opinion here — if it's got a lot of tension it will whip back at you);
- Unhook it at the ends;
- Unscrew the eyelets that hold it into the concrete posts;
- Go under it (only works if its really bagged out);
- Lifting the razor wire

At Faslane (and presumably other bases using weldmesh/razor wire combination) the razor wire is fixed to the top of the fence at three or four points. It's attached with small pieces (5cm) of wire twisted to keep them together. Having used the steps (see weldmesh home-made steps above) to get up, you snip these bits of wire. Then you need something to lift the razor wire. A bar (a tent pole?) long enough to make a gap between the top of the fence and the razor wire (two halves of a tent pole, just over 300mm long). Tent poles are easy to work with: you cut slits at each end, at right angles to each other, so you end up with two "V" shapes, one at each end. Push the razor wire up with one end and place the other end on the top of the fence. Alternatively have a couple of helpers on the ground with longer poles to push the razor wire (that way it would be harder to see evidence of a break-in).

Bread not Bombs Plowshares affinity group get some fence scaling training.
PHOTO: BREAD NOT BOMBS

Gates

If in doubt, always go for a gate to climb if you can. It's much more stable than a fence (unless it wobbles) and has a lot of bits you can put your feet on.

But before you climb, try and get under a gate (take your mobile phones/fags/chocolate/bible out of your back pocket, 'cos you can get wedged otherwise).

Have a plan for how you are going to get over the gate when you go to the top. This is the worst moment in your life when you realise that your body has no understanding of where it should move to, and, rigid with fear, you are unable to think about anything.

Study gates in advance and practise on a local gate where possible. Do it as many times as you can to conquer that horrible fear bit (some people do not get this feeling, but we have not heard from many).

This article has been collated from the experiences of many different people and the compilers gratefully acknowledge their input. The information herein is provided solely for sociological and entertainment purposes only and readers are in no way encouraged to undertake any illegal acts. Oh, no…