

The Action: 35 cats liberated and equipment damaged at Howard University Medical School. Washington, DC. December 25th 1983

Method of Entry: Building accessed with glass cutters to window. Lab doors pried open with crowbar.

The Lesson: Multi-layered security requires a multi-layered toolbox.



The Action: U.S. Naval Medical Research Institute has 1 dog liberated. Bethesda, MD. December 28th 1982

Method of Entry: Walked in during daylight hours.

The Lesson: When intuitive tactics fail, go counterintuitive: ex. "raiding in plain sight".

Action: 1,500 mink liberated from a fur farm. Astoria, OR. October 17th, 2008.

Method of entry: None needed. The farm, which spent its entire existence without its address made public, was comfortable enough in its anonymity to never have installed a fence. Within a month of its location being released publicly, the farm was raided.

The lesson: Forethought is not requisite for a farmer entering the fur industry, but it just may be necessary for them to stay in business.



How They Got In

Compiled from communiques, "how it was done" articles, media reports, and A.L.F. raid videos, a brief look at the most innovative surreptitious entry tactics, and what can be learned from them.



By: Peter Young

Missing from much coverage on and communiques from the A.L.F.s most expertly planned break-ins and live liberations are any mention of how the activists gained entry. And perhaps for good reason: revealing the method of access for the FBI and the action's target can provide clues to aid in the investigation and alert the facility and others to loopholes in security which could be patched, impeding future actions. Yet both the aspiring raider and academic voyeur read of skilled raids on a fortified facilities, and ask every time: How did they get in?

Action: 47 rats liberated from Scripps Hospital. San Diego CA. February 10th, 2008.

Method of entry: Unlocked door.

The action: Keeping it simple, activists gain access to a vivarium via an unlocked door and bring 47 rats to freedom.

The Lesson: It is more fruitful to find opportunity than to wait for opportunity to find you. Liberators make their own luck.

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The actions: The 90 recorded fur farm raids in the U.S. since 1995, seeing the release of hundreds of thousands of animals.

Method of entry: Activists report bypassing occasional photoelectric beam sensors by dropping to the ground and rolling under the beam.

The lesson: The low-tech can often defeat the high, and tricks from art gallery heist films do sometimes work.



The Action: Nearly 1000 animals liberated from UC-Riverside, equipment sabotaged. Riverside, CA. April 20th 1985

Method of Entry: Video released post-raid shows masked activists loading animals into trucks via a basement door. Inside the lab, activists pry door hinges from walls to access labs and vivariums.

The lesson: Locked doors are always negotiable.

The Action: University of Pennsylvania Head Injury Laboratory raided, equipment damaged, videos of experiments confiscated. Philadelphia, PA. May 28th 1984.

Method of Entry: Building accessed via ladder to unlocked second floor window. Lock to lab picked.

The Lesson: She with the greatest skillset yields the greatest results.

The Action: 12 dogs liberated from UC-Harbor Medical Center. Los Angeles, CA. December 25th 1983.

Method of Entry: Sledgehammer taken to door hinges, doors removed.

The Lesson: Brute force is not always elegant, but sometimes effective.



Action: Attempted arson at Utah Fur Breeder's Co-Op (fur feed facility). August 28th, 1991.

Method of entry: Unlocked hatch on roof.

Lesson: The best doors can be both out of sight, and horizontal.

Action: Liberation of 100 guinea pigs from Simonsen Laboratories (lab animal breeder). Morgan Hill, CA. July 1st, 1990.

Method of entry: Roof accessed via a pipe. Screws removed from vent and fan, providing access to roof crawlspace. Utility knife used to cut through sheet rock ceiling panels to access an animal room.

Lesson: In ALF actions, rooftops are a recurring theme.

The Action: Over 1,200 animals liberated and two fires set at the University of Arizona in the largest laboratory liberation to date. Tucson, AZ. April 2nd 1989.

Method of Entry: According to the post-raid article detailing the raid, a diverse palette of tactics were used including opening building doors “with a few small handheld tools which left no telltale sign of forced entry”, and cutting through an extractor fan on the psychology building loading dock with tin snips. Activists video taped the raid, which shows vivariums being accessed by liberators in lab coats smashing holes through glass door windows, reaching in, and unlocking the doors from the inside.

The Lesson: The over-arching lesson from this action and others: Being effective most often means making your own doors.

The Action: 264 animals liberated and \$120,000 damage done to University of Oregon. Eugene, OR. October 26th 1986.

Method of Entry: Undetectable.

The Lesson: Well-researched raiders know the layout and structural nuances of a lab better than the university staff themselves.

The Action: Activists enter SEMA Corporation (now called Bioqual) overnight, video-taping the conditions and liberating 4 chimpanzees. Rockville, MD. December 6th 1986

Method of Entry: Usable key made from a photocopy of the original, accessed by the A.L.F. momentarily by a contact on the inside.

The Lesson: It can be as much what you do as who you know.



Action: Failed liberation of primates from Tulane University Primate Research Center. 1990.

Method of entry: While the front of the facility was fortified, the facility backed up to a river. Activists purchased a boat to access from the rear. Security on the river-side was limited to photoelectric sensors, which were bypassed by rolling under the beam.

Lesson: Being deterred by alligator-infested waterways is optional.

The action: 21 mice liberated from Louisiana State University. New Orleans LA. April 22nd, 2005.

Method of entry: Activists broke through a vent in a side door of the biology building.

The Lesson: While doors may still be known as the worst way in, they can never be ruled out.



The action: 88 mice and 313 rats liberated from University of Iowa. Iowa City, IA. November 14th 2004

Method of Entry: While the lengthy communique reveals no clues as to how they bypassed alarms for each of the psychology building's security systems four-tiers (perimeter, elevator, corridor, animal room), the video of the raid shows masked activists accessing doors with what appears to be key cards, and picking the lock of a secured elevator. Photos released post-raid also show activists reaching through a door to unlock it via a hole they had cut through the wood, and post-raid media coverage reports rooms were accessed via employee key cards which accessed more rooms than the card's issuers intended. Speculation centered around the raid being an inside job.

The Lesson: Sophisticated security is only as secure as their most accessible key card.

The Action: 115 chickens liberated from Merial Select Pharmaceuticals. Berlin, MD. February 27th, 2003

Method of Entry: Animal house accessed by cutting through the windows and wire mesh covers, bypassing the door alarm.

The Lesson: Like most amateur burglars, animal abusers assume everyone goes through the front door. The wise liberator looks elsewhere.

The Action: 14 beagles liberated from Huntingdon Life Sciences. East Millstone, NJ. March 31st 2002

Method of Entry: Activists cut hole through ceiling to gain access to the animal house.

The Lesson: Walls and roofs are less physical barriers than psychological ones.

The Action: 179 birds liberated from Genesis Laboratories, a contract wildlife toxicology lab. Wellington, CO. August 28th, 2000.

Method of Entry: Using a high-speed drill and 3/8" drill bit, activists drilled several holes into the lab's metal siding. Using bolt cutters, the holes were then used to begin cutting through the corrugated metal. Fiberglass insulation was stripped away, and an additional hole was cut into the drywall giving them direct access to the lab.

The Lesson: With A.L.F. actions, Europe knows best. This was the first recorded incident of U.S. activists importing the tried and tested UK tactic of drilling through walls.

The Action: 116 animal liberated from the University of Minnesota. Millions of dollars in damage done to equipment in second building. Minneapolis, MN. April 5th 1999.

Method of Entry: The FBI was never able to determine how activists gained access to the two labs. Their best guess: the A.L.F. free-climbed the wall of a 5-story building and gained access through the roof.

The Lesson: There is always a way in. And its best if they never find out what it was.

The Action: 31 animal liberated from Western Washington University. Bellingham, WA. October 24th, 1999.

Method of Entry: Activists entered the basement of the WWU psychology building via unknown means. A set of keys was located in an unlocked office, giving them direct access to the labs and vivariums.

The Lesson: Sometimes it is that easy, and you'll never know until you put yourself in a laboratory basement at midnight prepared for anything.

The Action: Break-in and sabotage at Washington State University Poultry Research Laboratory. Puyallup, WA. November 20th, 1999

Method of Entry: In the video released post-raid, activists are seen smashing through a first-floor window, and crawling through to access the lab.

The Lesson: Aim for graceful, and settle for whatever works.



The Action: Two days after the torching of its trucks, the San Diego Meat Company building is set on fire. January 30th 1994.

Method of Entry: Access gained via a boarded up window.

The Lesson: Those who know have said that achieving maximum damage means locating the structural center of the building.



The Action: Break-in at animal researcher Frederick Knowlton's Utah State University office. Files taken and the office set on fire. Millville, UT. October 24th 1992

Method of Entry: Aluminum trim removed from window, and suction cups used to remove pane to gain access the researcher's office.

The Lesson: Going through the window doesn't always mean dangerous volume and excessive debris.

The Action: Oregon State University Experimental Fur Farm has files confiscated, building set on fire, and equipment destroyed. Facility closed as a result of this action. Corvallis, OR. June 10th 1991.

Method of Entry: Unlocked window.

The Lesson: Careless mistakes leading to the demise of labs don't find themselves, they need our help.

The Action: Washington State University Fur Animal Research Facility has two buildings broken into and 6 mink, 7 coyotes, and 10 mice liberated. Two offices had extensive damage done. Pullman, WA. August 13th 1991.

Method of Entry: Myth and legend tells of A.L.F. operatives dressed as maintenance workers entering the university building during the day, unscrewing the lock plates which hold the door closed, and replacing the screws with dummy replacements. These filed-down screws hold in place only during casual use, yet are so short as to pop out of the frame with a forceful tug. Activists returned to the lab at night with easy access to the building. Once inside, the fur industry researcher's office was accessed by pushing through the ceiling in the building hallway, and using a keyhole saw to cut away the thin drywall above the ceiling tiles.

The Lesson: If you look like you belong, and you act like you belong – you belong.