



MARK CARWARDINE

WILD THOUGHTS

I laughed out loud when I read a recent Royal Society analysis of artificial ways to curb global warming. One of the ideas in their report – taken very seriously by this fellowship of 1,400 eminent scientists – was a proposal to build five million highly expensive machines that could absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and hide it away in gargantuan safe-storage facilities.

The concept rang a bell, so I thought I'd do a bit of research of my own. What I've discovered is a thing called a tree. Now, trees occur in many parts of the world, and what's most exciting about them is that they actually suck carbon dioxide out of the air and replace it with oxygen – naturally.

In an ideal world, there would be lots of trees mopping up our excess carbon dioxide and doing the job of those five million high-priced, tree-like machines. So how about this for an alternative plan? We could spend a tiny fraction of the thousands of millions of pounds required for the proposed new technology and take advantage of the real thing. In fact, we could save the world's rainforests and help to save the world at the same time.

I'm being facetious, of course. I'm sure the Royal Society is perfectly aware that saving rainforests must play a vital role in tackling the problem of global warming. And, most importantly, geo-engineering projects such as tree-like machines could be a crucial last resort if – or, more likely, when – we fail to cut carbon dioxide emissions drastically enough and quickly enough.

But while building colossal forests of artificial trees sounds so laughably preposterous to the rest of us, I'll bet politicians, business leaders and in particular oil companies will absolutely welcome the proposal with open arms. Anything to avoid all the effort, inconvenience and lost profits involved in reducing carbon dioxide emissions – or, even worse, having to deal with those worthy, rather annoying, self-righteous, persistently meddling conservationists. What do they know anyway?



The tree: an amazing new solution for combating global warming.

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Following *Last Chance to See*, Mark will next be seen on our tv screens in 2010, presenting a series about London's Natural History Museum.