CHAPTER FOUR

Damaging the Forest

Rainforests in Peril

The rainforests of the world are being destroyed at the staggering rate of 40 hectares (100 acres) - that's 60 soccer pitches - every single minute! And despite years of protests, the logging, burning and pollution of the land shows no sign of stopping while there is still money to be made.

Logging ▼

The trees are mostly felled by huge machines that strip off the branches at the same time. Then they are hauled out of the forest on massive trailers. The falling trees and the colossal wheels of the machines flatten all the other plants so that everything is destroyed.

Road building ▲

The loggers build roads deep into the forest so that they can get their machines in and the logs out. Settlers follow the loggers and clear the virgin (unspoiled) forest on either side of the roads. They grow crops or graze animals to make a quick cash profit so they can feed their families.

Ranching ►

Ranchers own large areas of the Amazon forest. They clear and burn the jungle plants and grow grass to feed cows. The cows are eventually killed to make burgers for fast-food restaurants. But the goodness in the soil runs out after 3 or 4 years, so the ranchers have to clear even more forest.

Building dams

Falling water can be used to make cheap electricity called hydroelectricity. So, in many places, rivers are dammed to make lakes that contain enough water to turn the generating machines. When these lakes flood part of a rainforest, the plants and most of the animals are drowned.

Mining in the forest ►

There are mines in many parts of the world's rainforests, especially the Amazon, which produce iron, copper, manganese, aluminium, nickel or gold. The mines destroy trees and cause pollution with poisonous chemicals like mercury.

Talking Point

About half the rainforests that existed at the beginning of the 20th century were destroyed by the year 1999.

Q: How quickly are the rainforests being destroyed (see page 20)? How long will these forests last at this rate?

A: If the destruction continues, there may not be any rainforests left by 2050! That means the extinction of millions of animals and plants.