

Independence Day on Kayford Mountain

I spent 9-10 hours driving to Kayford Mountain on Independence Day week-end, when I would have preferred to stay home, and another 9-10 hours driving back. Doesn't make much sense except for the fact that mountaintop removal makes even less sense, and it is hard to turn down a request from Larry Gibson, to attend his annual picnic. As discussed in my book, *Storms of My Grandchildren*, Gibson (see attached photo, taken by Mark Schmerling) is the fellow, with bullet holes in the side of his cabin to show for it, who refuses to sell his property on Kayford Mountain, thus blocking further mountaintop removal there.

Ken Hechler (also in the photo) is running in the Democratic primary election to fill the seat vacated by the late Robert Byrd. Hechler, 95 years old, is a patriot, served in World War II, assisted Franklin Roosevelt in preparation of his public papers, was a West Virginia Representative and the only member of Congress to march with Martin Luther King at Selma Alabama in 1965. Hechler is running to draw attention to mountaintop removal. He understands coal mining – his work in Congress led to the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969, the first legislation to deal with black lung disease, and he has been opposing strip-mining and mountaintop removal for 40 years. The primary is 28 August – his campaign could probably still use support. Unfortunately, things are pretty greased (coal-fired) – Hechler is running against Governor Joe Manchin, who as described by Jeff Biggers on Huffington Post, has operated West Virginia as a self-described "extraction state" and, in a move to reserve the Senate seat for his own taking, appointed his former chief counsel to temporarily hold Byrd's seat.

Lorelei Scarbro was at Gibson's picnic too. She lives at the base of nearby Coal River Mountain, which she has been fighting to preserve against the destruction of mountaintop removal (see New York Times article of 15 August 2010). She and other brave people fighting mountaintop destruction have managed to slow the permitting process. Their objective is an alternative to the current poverty and destruction, invigorating the economy via ecologically sound renewable energies (see, e.g., <http://www.thesolutionsjournal.com/node/706>). It would make sense, as the United States gets only seven percent of its coal from mountaintop removal, less than it exports. But a change would take some leadership from the top, and unfortunately, at least so far, the United States EPA seems to be going along with approving permits for mountaintop removal.

People should be able to see what is happening, there is plenty of spectacular photographic documentation. See for example *Dragline* by Laura Antrim Caskey antrim@antrimcaskey.com, photos of Mark Schmerling in *Plundering Appalachia-- the Tragedy of Mountaintop-Removal Coal Mining* (Earth Aware Editions), and *Coal Country-- Rising Up Against Mountaintop Removal Mining* (Sierra Club Books), and in J. Henry Fair's to-be-published *The Day After Tomorrow; Images Of Our Earth In Crisis*. Henry twisted my arm to write a short piece, [Activist](#), explaining how I got dragged into this, which will be in his book.

Despite the lack of political help, nobody is giving up – on the contrary, the Appalachia Rising story will be taken to Washington, September 25-27. Information from Dave Cooper at <http://www.mountainroadshow.com/>



Larry Gibson, Jim Hansen, Ken Hechler (Photo credit: Mark Schmerling)