

Coal River Mountain Redux

Below is an update to the Coal River Mountain story that I described earlier in an [e-mail](#), in an [op-ed](#), and in "[Storms of My Grandchildren](#)".

Mike Roselle, of Climate Ground Zero in West Virginia, has an [op-ed](#) in CounterPunch re his upcoming trial in Raleigh County, West Virginia. He was arrested for trespass while protesting blasting near the Brushy Fork impoundment of 8 billion gallons of toxic coal sludge located directly above Marsh Fork Elementary School. (No word yet on trial date for Larry Gibson, Daryl Hannah and me re our arrest on 23 June 2009 for "obstruction", when I was reading a request that Massey Energy provide funds for a new elementary school at a safe distance.)

I got drawn into this by students at Virginia Tech, who fed me all the details when I gave a talk on their campus a couple of years ago. Underground Appalachian coal mining is being replaced in recent years by mountaintop removal. Big companies come in, dynamite the tops of the mountains, push the debris into the valleys, gather the coal from seams that are only several feet thick, and throw grass seed on what remains.

The number of jobs with this coal mining practice is small, and it leaves the environment in a shambles, the streams and underground water heavily polluted. But it pays off big for the few guys at the top. The head of Massey Energy, Don Blankenship, was paid \$17.8 million in 2009 plus \$27.2 million in deferred compensation. They must also have a lot of political clout, as it is hard to see how this abominable practice could continue otherwise.

Blankenship is the fellow who was photographed vacationing on the French Riviera with a West Virginia Supreme Court Justice. He also contributed \$3 million to help defeat re-election of another Supreme Court Justice he opposed. References for these statements can be found on Wikipedia under "Don Blankenship". The reason I mention the Wikipedia article is that it demonstrates the courage that it takes for Roselle to stand up to such people. Blankenship, for example, threatened an ABC News photographer with "If you're going to start taking pictures of me, you're liable to get shot!", as documented by references in the Wikipedia article. Reminds me of the bullet holes in Larry Gibson's cabin – made me nervous just to ride in his pick-up.

Roselle deserves support for his courage in standing up to the injustice at Coal River Mountain. He has pro bono lawyers, but there are still legal expenses including those for a lawsuit that Climate Ground Zero is bringing against Massey in Federal Court. They have raised funds or pledges for \$12,000 of expected \$20,000 costs, and need to raise the remainder by the end of the year. Donations of any amount to [Climate Ground Zero Legal Fund](#) would be appreciated.

This is not a hopeless story. Roselle believes, and I agree, that the attention is bringing the day closer when blasting will stop on Coal River and everywhere in the Appalachians. Now is the time to press the case and stop this wanton rape of nature.