



“ It takes
UNITY.”



Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards

Sam Broach

“Third generation deep-miner, longtime member of SAMS.”

They started stripping in 1962, I think it was, in my little home place in Boggs Avenue in Appalachia. And they tried to reclaim it and you can go up there right now, I went up there couple weeks ago. And over 40 years, if that's what they call reclamation, that's a joke. Because it still looks like a barren wasteland up there. Grass but no trees.

Well, really, up until a couple years ago, I hadn't really paid that much attention to it until a friend of mine started taking me around to some of the sites and seeing what was being done and explaining to me the destruction that mountaintop removal causes. I guess my biggest

inspiration was that I used to travel Black Mountain and work across the mountain in Lynch, Kentucky for about 12 years, 12-15 years. And I went up there one day and took a look back at what they're doing back there. I got to see the mountain being destroyed and stood there and watched it while they set off blasts. They do that just for a thin seam of coal. And that really broke my heart to see that and I thought, 'this has got to be stopped.' And I got to thinking, 'well what can one person do against all this?' You know one person can't do much. And that's when I started getting involved with organizations that can be heard, more than just one person.

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Of course I understand we need coal until we can transition into some cleaner energy. But they need to find a better way to get it than to destroy the mountains and our water the way they do it. And

that's what I feel like I'm fighting. I just want people to know that when I leave this world, I've made some kind of change, a change towards keeping our heritage and our mountains the way they are.

Judi Clark

"Lifetime resident of the area, member of SAMS, resident of Big Stone Gap, VA"

Two years ago, I attended my first Inman community reunion. So in the process of just talking to people and, you know, reconnecting with some people, a lady asked me when was the last time I had gone up on the mountain, meaning Black Mountain. And I told her it'd probably been over 30 years. And she says, 'Well, you need to go.' I say, 'Why?' She says, 'I'm not going to tell you, you just need to go.' I got very curious as to why she wouldn't say anything. So we took a ride up there after the reunion. And we didn't go far very, we just went up to the 'no trespassing' sign, where the mine's edge is. And what I saw just made me literally sick. I actually thought I was going to vomit. Then I got angry.

So I knew that a good friend of mine, Sam Broach, was involved in the SAMS organization so we got to talking about it and he was telling me all the things that were going on. And I was just floored. I just thought, how could this happen? It has to be illegal or something, when he was explaining what happened during mountaintop removal and all this. The more he told me, the angrier I got. And I thought, well I'm just one person but I've got to try to do something about it.

We just need to get away from coal. We really do because it's not going to last forever. And we need to have something in place, some kind of renewable energy to take the place of that. And we need to start working on that more now, to have that in place because if coal runs out, then what? We'll all going to be sitting

in the dark. It would literally shut this entire nation down. We need to get away from fossil fuels, that's just not for the future. We need to do something that's going to be renewable, that's going to last. Something that we can use over and over and over without destroying things. So that our future generations are going to have a chance, because our very survival depends on it.

Larry Bush

"Former deep miner and mine inspector, avid outdoorsmen"

From the time I was seven years old, my dad bought me a little .22 rifle and took me in these mountains, the mountains where I live right now, what's left of them. And we hunted. I was always taught by my father to respect the mountains and the wildlife. If you don't eat it, don't kill it. And to preserve everything that you can for future generations. And one thing that got me involved was that clearcutting issue. I went all over, to every state agency, every federal agency that I could go to, plumb into Washington and everybody tells me the same old story, 'there ain't nothing you can do.'

I actually went down below my house one time and called a supervisor, from Division of Mines, DMLR, Division of Mineland Reclamation. Called him up because his inspector wouldn't write a violation. The mud was so thick on the road, the main road, this is the road that serves Keokee, Exeter, and Imboden. I called up

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the inspector to look at the mud. I was an inspector so I know what they should do, and I said this inspector ain't doing nothing. He looked at that mud, as thick as it was on that road there, a danger to people sliding and whatever, and he said, 'well I ain't got no problem with it.' And I told him, I know you don't have a problem with it, but there are people who live in here that do have a problem with it. Not mention the damage it does to our vehicles. All this washes into the streams. But he didn't have a problem with it; they still don't have a problem with it.

Primarily the people suffer from this. You can go into these little communities; these were all set up at mining communities years and years ago. That's what they're destroying right now, is all these little communities and their towns. You'd think with coal supposedly, the answer for the future, that everybody around here, the streets would be paved with gold in these communities. But it's poor. We're the poorest- I think West Virginia then us then maybe Kentucky. We're the poorest per-capita state in the union, this part of the state. We've been served up to 'em.

Judy Needham

"Member of SAMS, resident of Andover, VA."

Many community members think, what's the point? Why spend my time? The big coal companies are going to do whatever they want. But I tell them we're making some progress. We're getting these hearings; we're making some progress. We've just got to keep fighting, keep going, we're making progress. But a lot of them, they do feel hopeless because the coal companies are so intimidating. And they feel that they have the money to do anything, even at any expense to the ordinary person. The coal companies have the money, the resources, connections, politicians.

When they tried to get a permit to mine in my community, on the other side, I was just heartbroken that they were going to destroy the mountains that I lived in, that I loved. Pat Jervis was on the board of directors at SAMS. His mother, Maude, got the brochures and came around to get everyone involved in Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards; it was a fairly new organization. So when she came around, I told her that I would join. And just felt that we needed to try to do something. And we had to fight. So I joined SAMS.

They did get the permit on the other side there, in Andover. And they did blast. I was angry because when we had the hearing in Andover church; DMME did, the informal hearing, they came and we could go on record. It was back in, I guess, 2000, but the gentlemen as good as told us that we could talk all we wanted but there was literally nothing we could do. And then I was angry. That made me even more determined.

Mike Clark

“Member of SAMS, resident of Big Stone Gap, VA”

We did the SAMS booth at the fair for about three nights this year. And we had strip miners come by and say, ‘if you could provide a green job for my family, I would love to quit doing what I’m doing.’ So you know that there’s people on the other side that wish they weren’t doing that job, but it’s what feeds their family. And you can’t help but feel for them, because they’re really between a rock and a hard place. The coal companies just keep spreading this fear that, ‘if we’re not here, you’re not going to be able to live. We’re the ones that supply you with a living and put you’re children through college.’

Then a lot of people think that we’re a real minority around here, that belong to SAMS. The main thing that got me involved in it

was the proximity of our church to Ison Rock Ridge. It's my belief that God created this county and this land and this earth for us to enjoy, not destroy, and for us to be good stewards of. And that's what I like about SAMS, that's we stand for- is being stewards of these mountains that we live in and we should stand up for that.

We're blessed to live in a country where we can stand up for the things we believe in, some countries don't have that right. I guess that's why our men and women go fight for us is for our right to vote, for our right to stand up and have a voice.

Bob Mullins

"Third generation deep-miner, Board member of SAMS, former Union member."

All the coal miners nowadays outside or underground think that our organization is working against them, by doing away totally with coal. If coal was done away with and we go to some other power or source of power, then they're not going to have jobs and that's what they're worried about. They don't realize that we're trying to create more jobs for the underground; they're shortening their work life by mountaintop removal. Now some of them understand. The ones I've talked to, I've got a few people that I've talked to, they understand what I'm talking about. But they still don't want us interfering with their homes and their jobs.

Some of these guys that I ride with and are friends with, that's the only thing they know how to do. They've never worked underground and some of them probably wouldn't work underground if they had the opportunity. And all they know is heavy machinery and the type of work they're doing, which is mountaintop removal. And I can't come up to my friends and tell them, 'quit work.' Because someone's going to step in and do that job they're doing, regardless whether they're doing it or not. I just as soon my friends

to be working as anything than a stranger. And it's going to be done. The only way we're going to stop that is to stop all the mountaintop removal and create more jobs.

When this was a union area, the union stuck together, and it's hard to fight a group. And now I think these neighbors feel that we don't have a large enough group to protect them. And if you fight too hard, then you could get your windows broke out or your home burnt or something. If you're too much of a stumbling block, there's so many miners and things around here that would fight against you. We don't have the strength as we had when we were all union in this area. You take three or four people up in the area where I live, if we were to go out there and stand in the road, those trucks would run over top of us. But if there was 500 people standing there in the middle of the road, they would stop. So it takes numbers to do anything.

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Tug Smith

"Resident of Exeter, VA"

People are reluctant to make an effort and I don't know how you can motivate people. I've tried, I've argued, I've tried common sense. I try to get that attitude across to people when I speak with them, that doing nothing is going to accomplish nothing. And they're just willing to accept things as they are and as they're

going to be. They expect the mountains to be torn away. And rather than rebel and trying to stop it, they're just accepting it and going on. And that's frustrating as hell to me, it just frustrates me. That people won't do what needs to be done. And that's not just my opinion, that's a fact. Something needs to be done about this situation.

I feel confident that if we could get enough people acting aggressively against it, not just accepting it as something that's unavoidable, I think we could stop them from tearing our mountains down like they are. I really do. But it's going to take a lot of people, if not the heavy majority, to do it. It's been stopped in other places. They stopped it in Wyoming. I read an article in some magazine, I don't recall which one, but they were coming close to this little town. And when they go through, they have huge huge equipment, a bucket will pick up a hundred tons in one whack. And the people rose up and they said 'no further' and they stopped it. They couldn't mine any closer to the town. There was a 12-foot seam of coal that ran dead under this community. And it's very high-grade coal and corporations were determined, but the people were more so, and they stopped it.

That's what I think we need to do, more than anything else, is make people realize that something can be done but it's going to take a large movement, it's going to take a lot of people. There's not enough people stressing the fact that there is something we can do but it takes unity to do it. And without the unity, by golly, it'll continue on. If we could just get enough people to raise hell and go through our elected officials and make them do their jobs, then I think we would get some results.

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Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards is an organization of concerned community members and their allies who are working to stop the destruction of our communities by surface coal mining, to improve the quality of life in our area, and to help rebuild sustainable communities.

If you're interested in sharing your story, becoming a SAMS member, or receiving information about future events, visit samva.org or call 276-523-4380. Membership meetings happen on the third Tuesday of every month at 6:30 in the office, all are welcome.

www.samsva.org 276-523-4380

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A special thanks to these organizations that made this project possible:



www.appvoices.org

The Rrenew Mission is to help in the building of a sustainable, healthy and just Appalachia (the town and the region) by providing an affordable living and working space for long term volunteers working with local organizations that share the vision of a sustainable Appalachia.

www.rrenewcollective.org



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