Synopsis

What happens when fossil fuels run out?
How do communities and cultures survive?

*After Coal* profiles inspiring individuals who are building a new future in the coalfields of eastern Kentucky and South Wales. This hour long documentary invites viewers to the front lines of the transition away from fossil fuels. Coalfield residents who must abandon traditional livelihoods share stories from the front lines of the transition away from fossil fuels.

Meet ex-miners using theater to rebuild community infrastructure, women transforming a former coal board office into an education hub, and young people striving to stay in their home communities. The stories of coalfield residents who must abandon traditional livelihoods illustrate the front lines of the transition away from fossil fuels. Music plays a major role in this documentary essay, linking the two regions and providing cultural continuity that sustains communities through rapid change.
Logline

*After Coal* profiles inspiring individuals who are building a new future in the coalfields of eastern Kentucky and south Wales.

Director’s Statement

What happens to coal mining communities after the mines shut down? Why do some places survive while others become ghost towns? As a filmmaker who has spent my career living and working in the coalfields of eastern Kentucky, these questions are close to my heart. I have a stake in the communities that are facing the limits of our fossil fueled economy.

To explore the challenges facing communities in transition, I traveled to South Wales, where most coal mines shut down after the 1984-1985 miners’ strike. I met inspiring individuals who have fought to rebuild their communities. Their commitment to place reminded me of my friends in central Appalachia. During my travels, I learned that there is not a simple solution to rebuilding coalfield communities. However, the places that survive have diverse leadership, democratic institutions, and support local culture.

Throughout this documentary, music from the mountains of central Appalachia and the valleys of South Wales reveals the deep bonds that have allowed these two cultures to survive in the harshest of conditions. I believe that comparing the Welsh and Appalachian experience with coal will help all of us see a future beyond fossil fuels.

Background

After Coal’s roots reach to 1974, when Appalachian scholar Helen Matthews Lewis spent two years in Wales researching coalfield communities. Together with sociologist John Gaventa and filmmaker Richard Greatrex, the team made over 150 videotapes of daily life in South Wales. The Center for Appalachian Studies at Appalachian State University has facilitated over three decades of exchange between the two regions.

The Welsh coalfields were shut down in the 1980’s, eliminating more than 20,000 jobs. Meanwhile, the Appalachian coalfields lost over 20,000 mining jobs between 1994 and 2014. Both regions have survived disasters associated with mining production and waste disposal, and each have explored strategies for remembering the past while looking to the future.
Production Photos

Hi Resolution Photos Available: aftercoal.com/photos

Ann Schertz directs the Higher Ground Chorus in Harlan County, Kentucky.

Cinematographer Suzanne Clouzeau records an interview with Geraint Lewis near Abercraf, Wales.

Former coal miners Rutland Melton and Carl Shoupe participate in the Appalachia’s Bright Future conference in Harlan, Kentucky.

Shoppers at the farmers market stroll outside a former miners’ club in Ystradgynlais, Wales.
Production Team

After Coal director Tom Hansell’s documentary work has been broadcast nationally on public television and has screened at international film festivals. Hansell’s documentary Coal Bucket Outlaw was broadcast on public television in 30 states. His most recent documentary, The Electricity Fairy, screened at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2010 and was selected by the SouthArts for the Southern Circuit tour of independent filmmakers. After Coal is Hansell’s first international project.

Patricia Beaver is a producer of the After Coal project. As director of the Center for Appalachian Studies at Appalachian State University, she coordinated the groundbreaking Appalachian Land Ownership Study in 1978, hosted an exchange of Welsh miners in 1979, and started a Welsh study abroad program in 2001. Her work connecting global mountain regions continues to this day.

Associate Producer Angela Wiley grew up in West Virginia and studied Film & Digital Technology, Environmental Studies, and Library & Information Science in Pittsburgh, PA. She assisted with post-production, develops outreach materials, and manages digital tools for After Coal.
Support

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