



David Brower, an Aggressive Champion of U.S. Environmentalism, Is Dead at 88

By RICHARD SEVERO

David Brower, an uncompromising environmentalist who spent more than half a century fighting to protect America's wilderness areas against speculators, developers, state agencies and the federal government, died on Sunday at his home in Berkeley, Calif. He was 88.

Mr. Brower was widely regarded one of the most articulate and powerful conservationists of the 20th century, and at various times led a number of environmental groups, including the Sierra Club and Friends of the Earth.

Long an opponent of compromise in the face of efforts to tame wild lands, he was a primary force during the 1960's in preventing the construction of two major government dams in the Grand Canyon. He also played a pivotal role in blocking a dam, proposed for the Green River in Utah, that would have flooded parts of Dinosaur National Monument.

Over the years he also fought, sometimes alone, to maintain the wilderness of the Northern Cascades in Oregon and Washington, Point Reyes and Kings Canyon in California, the Great Smoky Mountains in Tennessee and North Carolina, the Red River Gorge in Kentucky, the Allagash Wilderness in Maine and the Everglades in Florida.

He sought to protect redwoods from loggers, animals from furriers, porpoises from tuna fishermen and the public from nuclear energy and any number of projects proposed by the Army Corps of Engineers and the Federal Bureau of Reclamation.

Mr. Brower (the name rhymes with "hour") also spoke against the indiscriminate use of herbicides and pesticides.

"You are villains not to share your apples with worms," he would tell his audiences. "Bite the worms. They won't hurt nearly as much as the insecticide does."

Mr. Brower's life seemed to be a perpetual joust against what he found

"Brower," Mr. McPhee wrote, "has computed that we are driving through the earth's resources at a rate comparable to a man's driving an automobile a hundred and twenty- eight miles per hour — and he says that we are accelerating. He reminds his audiences that buffalo were shot for their tongues alone, and he says that we still have a buffalo-tongue economy.

" `We're hooked on growth. We're addicted to it. In my lifetime, man has used more resources than in all previous history.' "

If Mr. Brower was a druid, he was an angry one; he seemed to maintain a level of indignation that would have burned out a lesser man.

"I wish we didn't have to be angry all the time," he said. "But someone has to get angry."

Russell Train, who in the early 1970's was administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, once observed: "Thank God for David Brower. He makes it so easy for the rest of us to be reasonable."

In 1952, Mr. Brower became executive director of the Sierra Club, the conservation organization founded in 1892 by the naturalist John Muir. It had a membership of 7,000 and an annual budget of \$75,000 when Mr. Brower started. By 1969, when he stepped down under pressure by members who thought he had gone too far too fast, it had 77,000 members and assets of \$3 million, and had probably blocked or delayed construction of at least \$7 billion.

Because of its opposition to the two proposed dams in the Grand Canyon, the Sierra Club lost its tax-exempt status in 1966, on the ground that it had become much a political organization. Mr. Brower later told the membership that it owed thanks to Sheldon Cohen, the commissioner of internal revenue, because his ruling had attracted new, militant members who did not care whether joining gave them a tax advantage.

Even as it moved from the gentility of Muir's time to the militancy of Mr. Brower, the Sierra Club attracted favorable notice from more traditional conservationists with its handsomely illustrated books, which argued the cause of nature with photographs. The books were Mr. Brower's idea, and among those for which he was editor and publisher were "Summer Island — Penobscot Country"; "Time and the River Flowing," which described the Grand Canyon; and "Gentle Wilderness — The Sierra Nevada."

But the Sierra Club's militancy continued to irritate some members, none more so than the photographer Ansel Adams, who described Mr.

He was dismissed as chairman of Friends of the Earth in July 1984 amid complaints that he had been too dictatorial and too wasteful in refusing to carry out staff cuts ordered by the board. He was reinstated a month later but resigned from the board in 1986.

In the meantime, there had been a reconciliation between Mr. Brower and the Sierra Club, which appointed him to its board in 1982. Over the years, the Sierra Club's 600,000 members would re-elect him to the 15-member board by overwhelming margins. He was last elected in 1998 but resigned this spring, once again citing differences between the board's agenda and his.

"The world is burning, and all I hear from them is the music of violins," he said in resigning. "May the Sierra Club become what John Muir wanted it to be and what I have alleged it was."

In his last years, Mr. Brower, still a fit and imposing man of 6 foot 3, with a shock of white hair, continued to stake out a militant's view of conservation, winning new adherents to the cause. He helped establish an organization of steel workers and environmentalists called the Alliance for Sustainable Jobs and the Environment, based in Portland, Ore.

A supporter of Ralph Nader, Mr. Brower flew to Denver in June for the Green Party convention and cast his absentee ballot for president the day before he died, said Mikhail Davis, his assistant at the Earth Island Institute in San Francisco, which Mr. Brower founded in 1982 to promote conservation projects around the world.

Mr. Brower is survived by his wife of 57 years, the former Anne Hus; three sons, Robert and John, both of Berkeley, and Ken, of Oakland, Calif., and a daughter, Barbara Brower of Portland.

David Ross Brower was born on July 1, 1912, in Berkeley, the son of Ross J. and Mary Grace Barlow Brower. His father, who took the family on frequent camping and hiking trips, taught mechanical drawing at the University of California and then, having lost that job, managed and did janitorial work in two buildings he owned.

Mrs. Brower, also a lover of the outdoors, lost both her sight and her sense of smell to an inoperable brain tumor when David was young; he later recalled taking her on walks after she had lost her vision. He became permanently interested in both mountain climbing and butterfly collecting, enjoying his ability to identify almost any butterfly that fluttered near him.

Press, where he edited manuscripts, and remained there until assuming the leadership of the Sierra Club, of which he had been a member since 1933, nearly two decades earlier.

In the 1960's and 70's, environmentalists were sometimes perceived as elitists who did not care if their activities contributed to unemployment. In his autobiography, "For Earth's Sake: The Life and Times of David Brower" (Gibbs Smith, 1990), Mr. Brower said, "We are in sympathy with the straits of unemployed loggers, but before we let sympathy be an easy route to expedience, let us consider who else needs some sympathy."

As a man who disliked cars, Mr. Brower added, "We can, upright people that we are, rediscover the foot; we can save a place to walk in, and an antelope, too."

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