



Overburden

A Journey Into the Soul of Central Appalachia

By (photographer) Mikael Lundström

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- Powerful Visual Testimony – Honest, moving portraits of Appalachian life
- Historical Depth – Traces cultural evolution from early settlers to post-coal collapse
- Social Commentary – Highlights poverty, exploitation, and the opioid crisis
- Rich Cultural Context – Explores a region tied to coal, country music, and religion
- Empathetic Lens – Balances critique with human dignity and emotional depth

In **Overburden**, photographer Mikael Lundström journeys through the central Appalachian mountains in the East of the USA, an area shaped by coal-mining, poverty, and deep religion. It is also thought to be the birthplace of country music. The first settlers, fleeing religious persecution in their home countries, appreciated the remoteness and quiet of the region. Over many generations, they lived separate from other immigrants, resulting in the formation of a unique mountain culture. However, this relative isolation was brought to an end at the close of the 19th century with the rise of the coal industry. Mining settlements sprang up around the mines, revealing the harsh face of capitalism. The mixture of old mining traditions, new waves of immigration, and the ruthless exploitation of people and nature continues to shape the area to the present day.

Now that the coal mines have shut down, the population of these once-flourishing mining towns is dwindling, and the opioid crisis has left behind deep scars. Lundström's images are an uncensored yet empathetic testimony to the region. They tell of turbulent times and of the people who live and work here, the daily challenges they face, and the hopes that carry them through.

Mikael Lundström is a Swedish photographer known for his socially engaged documentary work. In **Overburden**, he explores the Appalachian region with a compassionate eye, capturing the lasting impact of coal mining, economic decline, and cultural resilience in America's mountain communities.

