

Landscape Photography

More than just about the scenery
T. Anthony Harding

"Morning at Mabry Mill"
Mabry Mill, Blue Ridge Parkway, Virginia (Oct, 2023)

ISO720, 1/13 sec, 65mm focal length, f4, 0eV, 24-70 f2.8, CPL

Landscape Photography

“Capturing an image that embodies the spirit of the outdoors”..

Agenda:

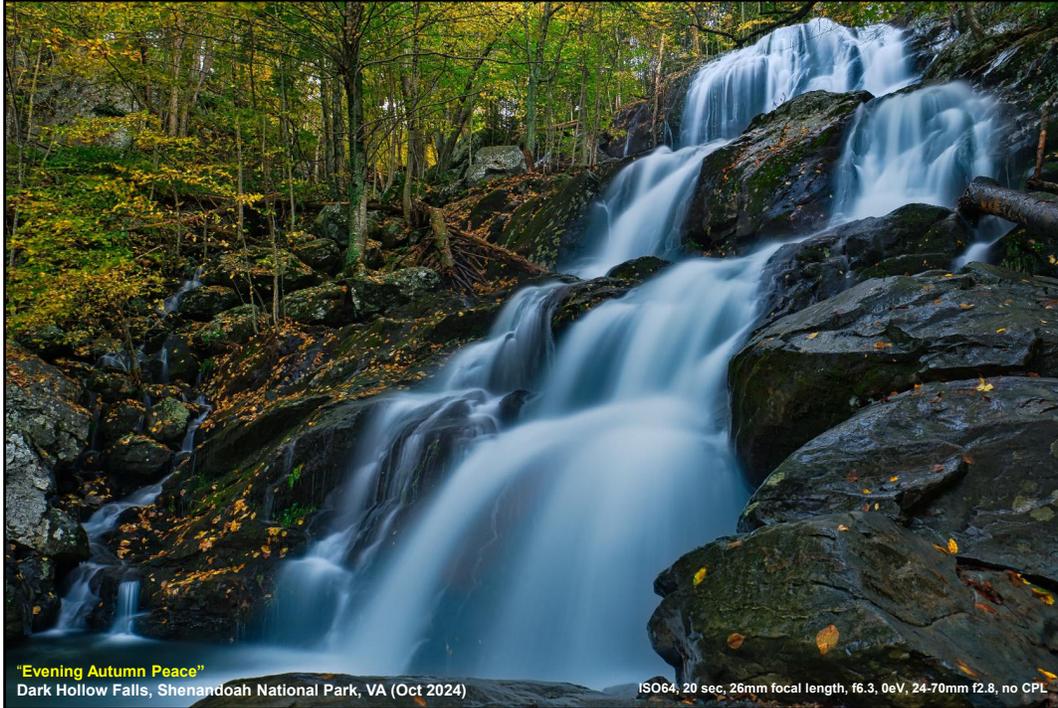
- Introduction
- Planning/Setup
- Phone/Desktop Applications
- Examples!
- Tips & Tricks



- **PLANNING/SETUP**

- I ALWAYS plan my outings.
Leave "winging it" to the birds...
- Location
- Subject
- Weather
- Travel, Walking, Setup Time
(arrive AT LEAST 1 hr earlier...)
- Specialized or legacy gear?

- Don't pack the kitchen sink. Take what you think you'll need to the site, not every piece of gear you have some of which you know you won't use.
- If you're going to a specialized location (e.g. caverns, etc), call ahead or do a desktop search to identify recommended general items to bring with you.
- Why are you going and plan accordingly (just for fun, experimentation, for professional publication, capturing image for a contest, commercial purposes). If an outing is strictly for me, I am far more flexible with my scheduling.



Plan or Pout!

Arrival time?

When to
leave?

Headlamp(s)?

- Take total travel, preparation, hiking, and setup times into account when determining when you need to arrive at the site and have AMPLE time to spare to setup. Don't force yourself to have to rush to setup!
- If you have any physical limitations or injuries, BE REALISTIC in your planning and take that into account. Leave hubris at the door.



"The Pastel Room"
Luray Caverns, VA (Jan 2023)

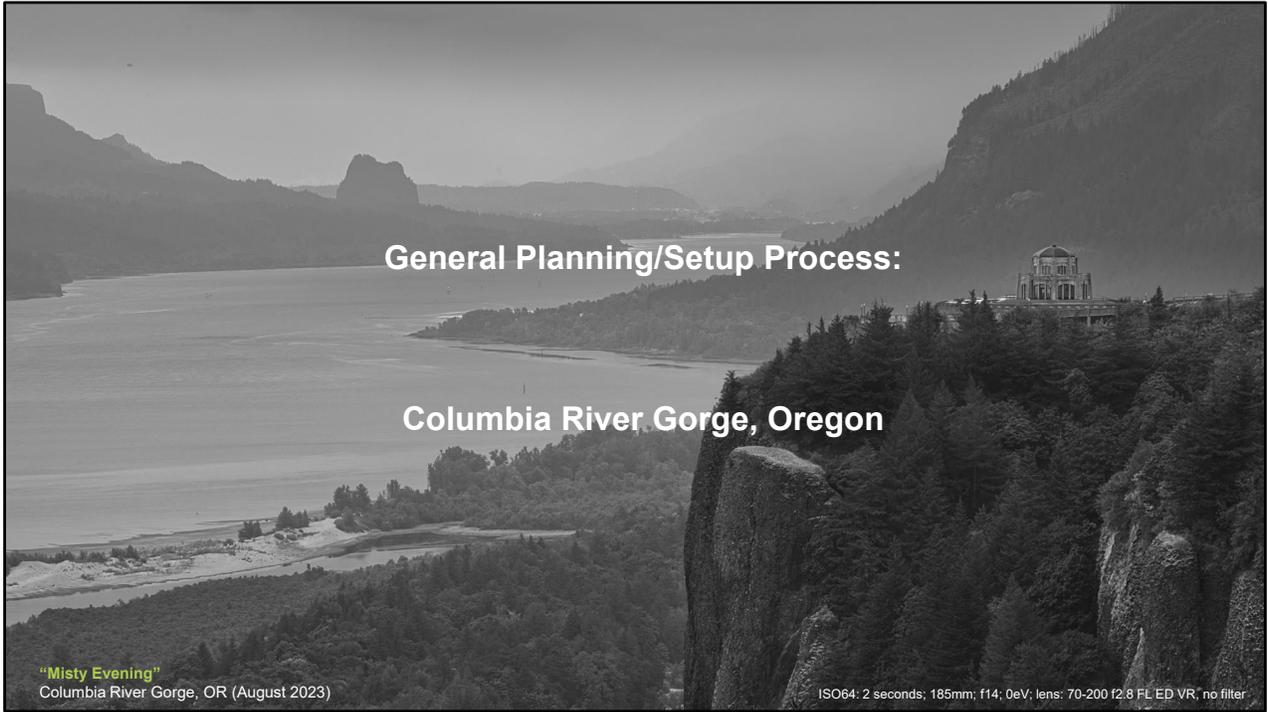
ISO125, 6 sec., 55mm focal length, f12, 0eV, 24-70 f2.8

- Time of year
- Open hours
- Known Lighting Conditions (e.g. Luray vs. Shenandoah)
- Tourists?

- Luray Caverns has white (sodium) architectural lighting so colors are all formational; therefore your camera sensor will be able to capture the subtle formation colors
- Shenandoah and Skyline Caverns have colored architectural lighting, so, while beautiful and wonderfully dramatic, if you're looking to capture the actual formation colors, you will not be able to as it will be masked by the colored lighting
- Caverns are great to visit during the winter months as there are **FAR** less tourists; Luray you will likely be able to easily schedule a tour guide.
- If you shoot the caverns in the winter you likely won't have problems with bringing your tripod due to the lack of crowds; in the tourist season that may not be the case so need to **CALL AHEAD OF TIME**. If no tripods are allowed, you may be able to get away with bringing along a mini tripod
- Winter months are **FANTASTIC** for the battlefields as due to weather you'll likely have very few tourists to contend with



- Ravens Roost overlook is gorgeous but there are cliffs that drop vertically for several hundred of feet without guardrails/safety fencing so if you're afraid of heights, take into account views and access is somewhat limited where the juniper is located.
- Sunset is fantastic here as it drops behind the mountain range in the background; however, the downside is this is a very popular site with wedding photographers during the spring and fall who commonly crowd the area with wedding parties. BY FAR sunrise is the better option for all times of the year if you're looking to avoid crowds (there are none) plus you get the benefit of the pastel skies. The view is west facing.

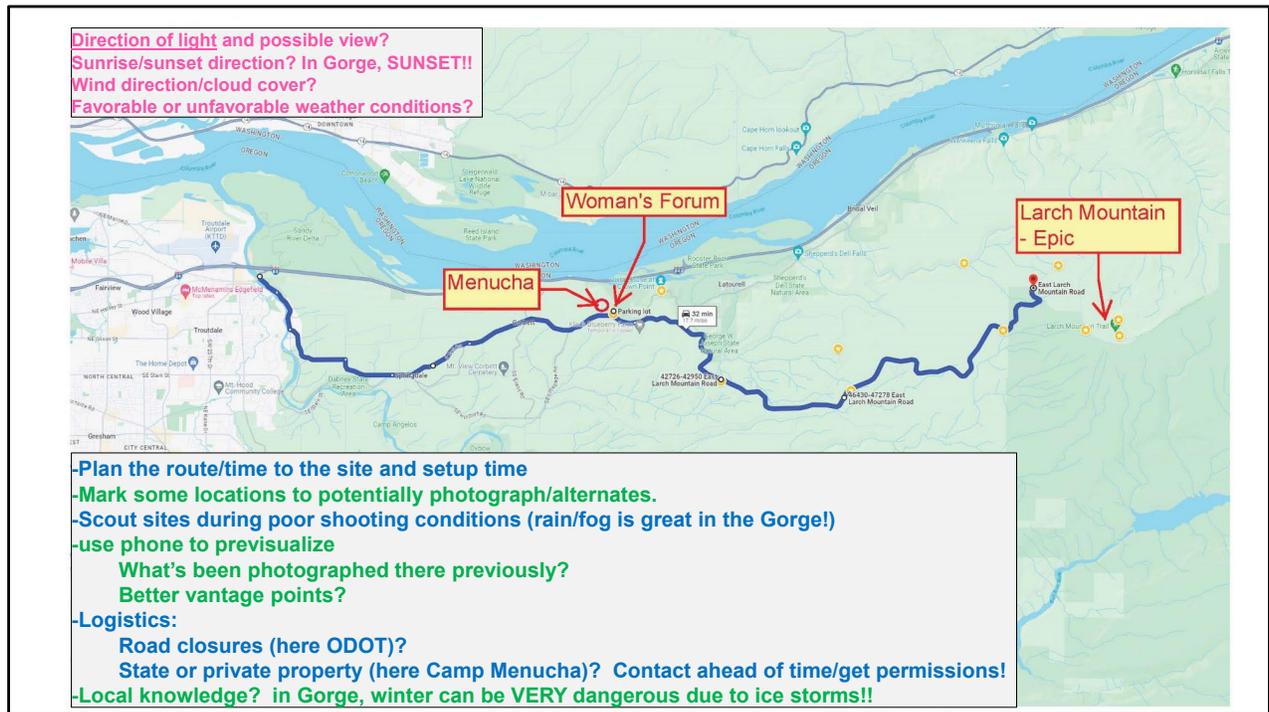


General Planning/Setup Process:

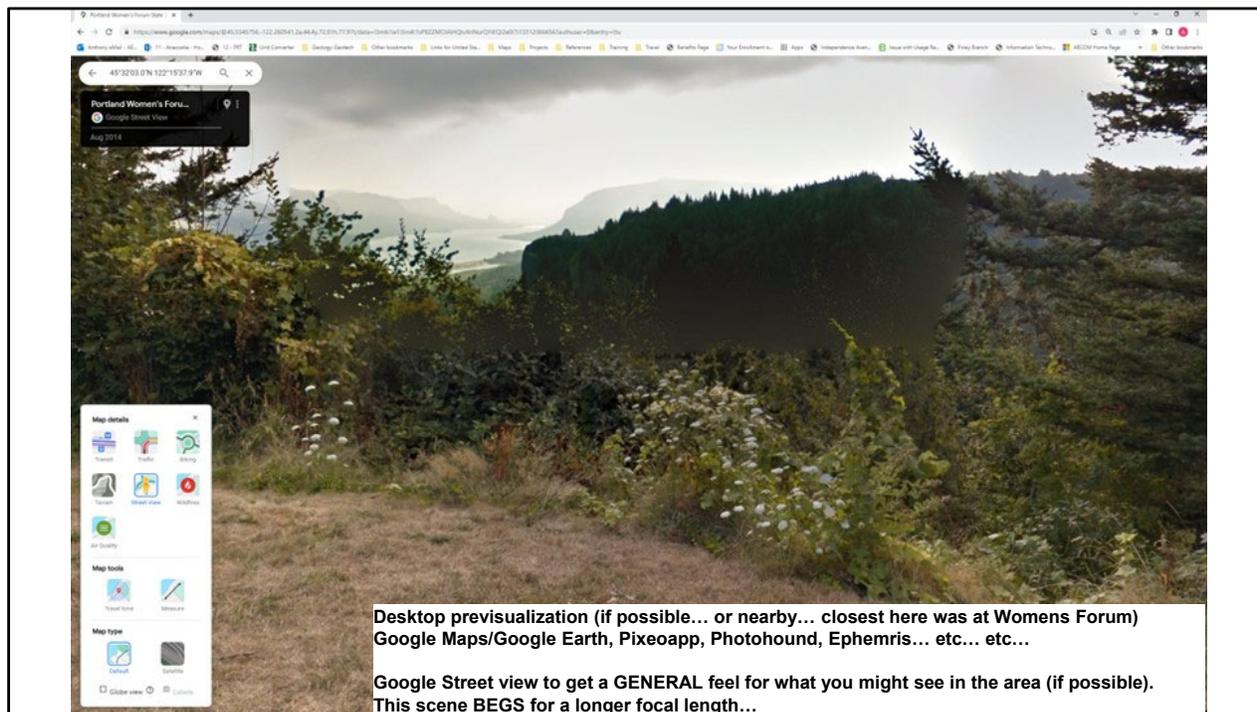
Columbia River Gorge, Oregon

"Misty Evening"
Columbia River Gorge, OR (August 2023)

ISO64; 2 seconds; 185mm; f14; 0eV; lens: 70-200 f2.8 FL ED VR, no filter



- As much as I can, I limit items I will be forced to leave to chance (I can FORECAST the weather but have no control over it so plan for contingencies). If it is a variable I can control, I do. “Hope is not a plan”.
- If you plan your outing, you much improve your chances for a successful shooting session and prevent wasting unnecessary time; had I decided to drive up to Larch Mountain, I would have met a road closure forcing me to turn around; it takes 15 minutes to drive from the Old Scenic Highway to the parking lot at the summit of Larch Mountain meaning I would have lost 30 minutes of time. I checked the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), discovered the closure, so adjusted my initial plan.



- Keep in mind desktop searches are to just give you an IDEA of what you might encounter in the area to get the creative juices flowing. I also look at USGS topographic maps (7.5-minute topographic maps that are FREE to access/download
- [Magnetic Declination \(Variation\) | NCEI](#) (website to determine the magnetic declination in an area you might be planning to hike to so that you can set your compass to the correct declination)
- [National Geologic Map Database](#) (USGS website); 7.5 Minute map equivalent to scale of 1:24,000; standard map scale. This site has ABUNDANT geologic and geographic references you can find in the area and download FOR FREE to your computer. Geologic maps (particularly topographic contours) will help you identify likely places rock outcrops might be if you're looking for rock to be in the foreground or background. Many times parks maps or publications are here as well.
- [Map Locator | USGS Store](#) (free topographic maps by quadrangle/region 1:24,000/7.5 minute-quadrangle maps)
- [Light pollution map](#) (astrophotography)

- <https://photoephemeris.com/> (sun/moon rising/setting, light direction, etc)
- [Projects | Virginia Department of Transportation](#) (VDOT current/ongoing projects re: traffic, detours, & closures)
- [NPS.gov Homepage \(U.S. National Park Service\)](#) (information about all parks throughout the US).



Magic Hour



Photopills



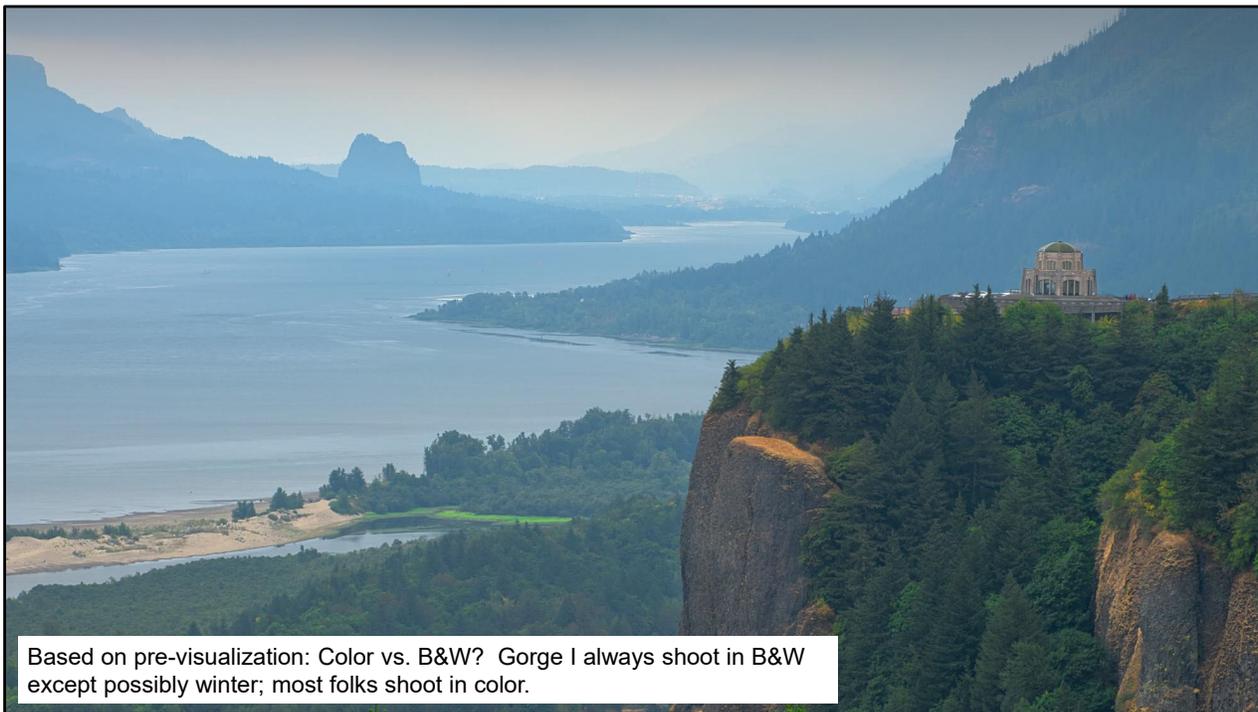
Weatherbug



Windy

Others I use: Ephemeris, Sun/Moon Expert; **Previsualization: Magic Film ViewFinder, Magic ARRI, Light Pollution...**

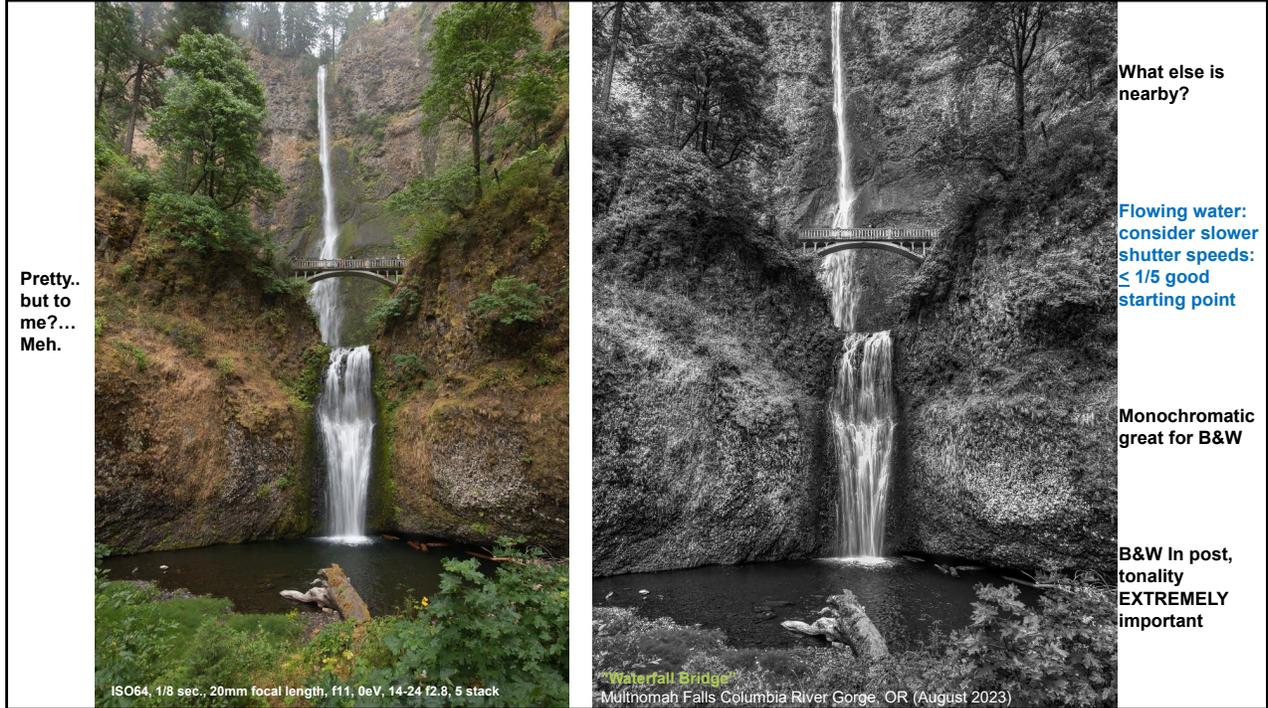
- Both Magic ViewFinder and Magic ARRI allow you to use the camera of your cell phone and zoom in at various focal lengths to get a feel for what a potential perspective/composition might look like (i.e. help you previsualize the shot) before you pull equipment out of the bag, saving a lot of time.



Based on pre-visualization: Color vs. B&W? Gorge I always shoot in B&W except possibly winter; most folks shoot in color.



- A monochromatic scene is great for B&W photography, particularly where there is a lot of contrast.
- Need to pay attention to how a scene makes you FEEL to determine if that feeling is best communicated in color, or when color distractions are removed.



- When you plan, have alternate sites in mind (and how to get to them) in the event the intended site falls through (for those alternative sites, I try to select them in order so that I can drive from one to the next in line to avoid traveling back in forth in different directions for efficiency).
- If you know your site has a waterfall, consider the INTENT. Are you just trying to show the raw power (like Niagra Falls) in which case a faster shutter speed might be more appropriate to freeze the turbulence? Are you trying to show some movement (shutter speeds of 1/5 to 1 sec good for that)? Do you want the water to both show movement but also have elements of power and fluidity (shutter speeds >10 sec might be good for that)? Select the shutter speed appropriate to your intended mood/feeling as a starting point and then experiment

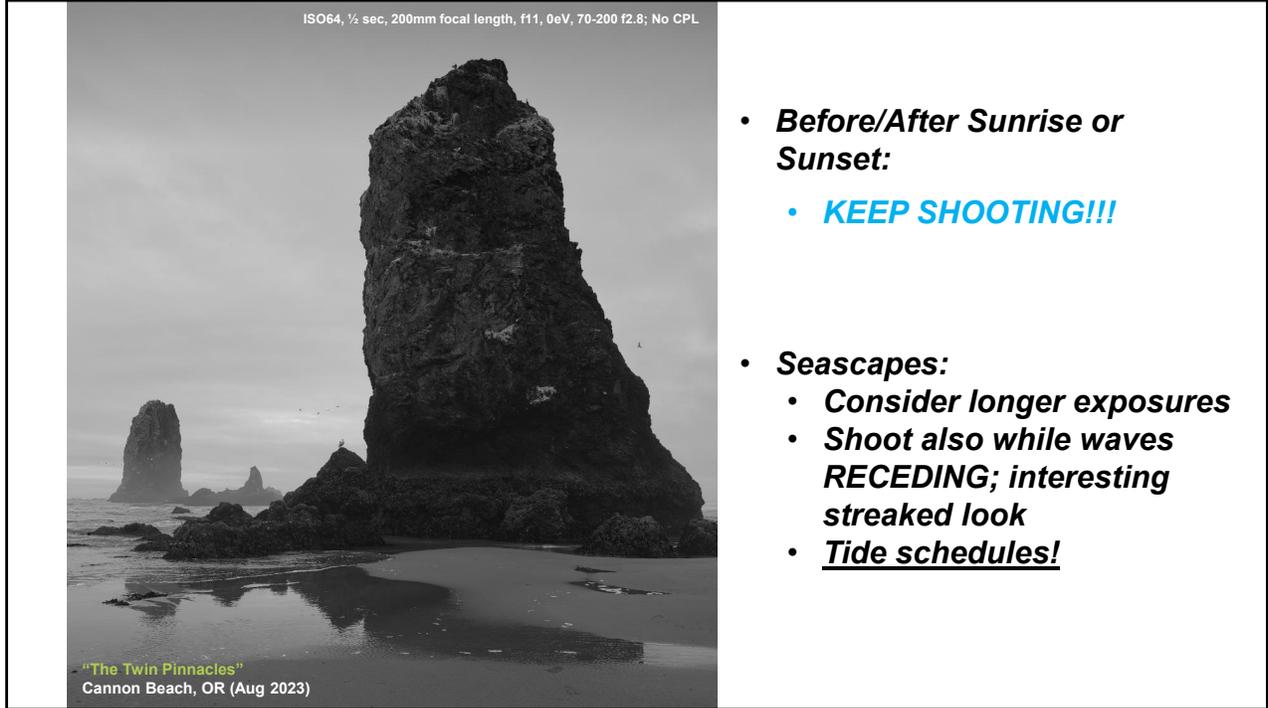


"Haystack Rock and the Twin Pinnacles"
Cannon Beach, OR (Aug 2023)

ISO64, 1/25 sec., 18mm focal length, f8, 0eV, 14-24 f2.8

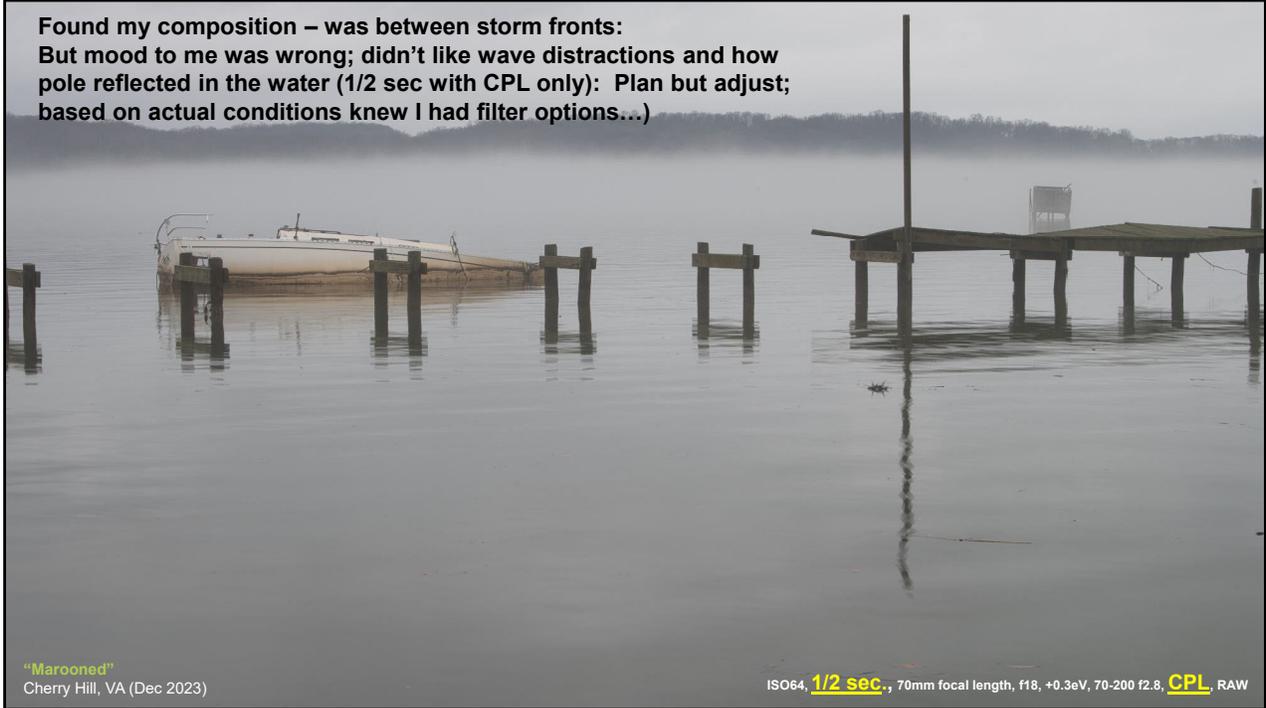
Sometimes even with planning, things go amok... Oops.... Got **SOAKED**.... Most definitely wasn't the plan...

- Lessons learned over the years in the mountains and the northwest and west coastal shores: always be prepared for unpredictable weather conditions. In the Cascade Mountains, weather can change as quickly as 20 minutes (e.g. bright sun to snowstorm or rain/fog) so bring clothing to accommodate different conditions based on location. Even I forget and pay for it.. Like at Cannon Beach. Walked 1 mile out to Haystack Rock in the dark; ½ mile in a downpour started, but I gambled the 40% chance of rain by dawn was an acceptable risk... Northwestern Coastline is notoriously unpredictable. I had nowhere to go, so just had to sit on a driftwood stump until dawn and got soaked. That wasn't in the plan, but I did wear clothing that dried quickly...
- So... don't forget to include weather conditions in your plans



- For seascapes, most definitely dawn and dusk are the most dramatic; you should be there:
 - at the start of the blue hour and continue shooting until well after dawn
 - At the start of the magic hour (hour just before sunset) and continue shooting through the blue hour (after sunset)
- The longer the exposure, the more the waves (and fog) will be smoothed.
- On the sand, try capturing an image while the wave is flowing back out to sea; also try it when the wave is advancing. See which one you prefer
- Need to get closer to the sea when shooting sea stacks in general

Found my composition – was between storm fronts:
But mood to me was wrong; didn't like wave distractions and how
pole reflected in the water (1/2 sec with CPL only): Plan but adjust;
based on actual conditions knew I had filter options...)



- Here my first impression seeing the sunken sailboat was a feeling of someone had been marooned but not knowing why or how specifically they were from shore (in reality... not far at all). Because I was between two bands of rain storms this site just had a somber and haunting mood. Only a filter would allow me to capture an image with this dramatic feeling.

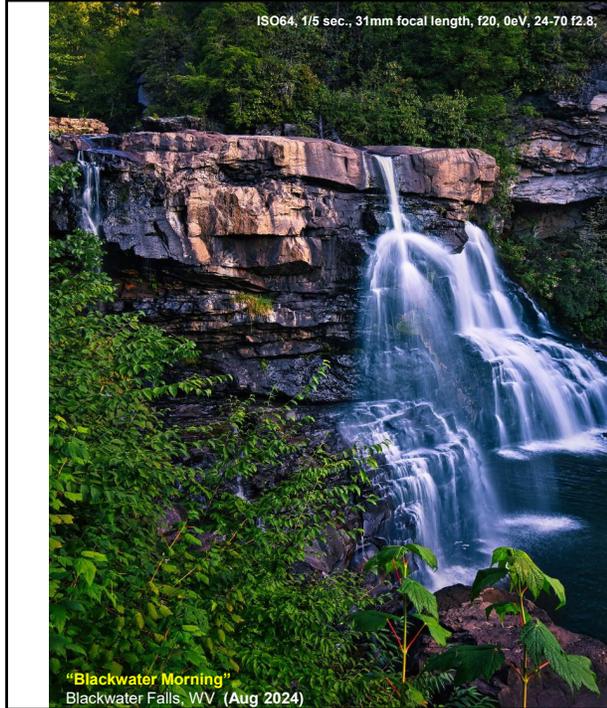
Lee "Big Stopper" app

- When to use an ND filter?
 - slows shutter speed.
 - Changes mood.
 - **USE APPLICATIONS TO ESTIMATE EXPOSURE TIME**
 - 10-stop(+) ND = smoothens waves; blends/streaks clouds/fog; erases moving objects.
 - Stop-loss is additive with other filters.. Keep cumulative stop losses in mind.
- **Pitfall:** may introduce color cast; poor quality filters suffer more

- See previous image showing shutter speed of $\frac{1}{2}$ second. That was the ideal exposure of the image WITHOUT the ND filter on. In Lee Stopper, you select if you have a 6-stop, 10-stop, or 15-stop ND and then simply swipe the white circle until that shutter speed (i.e. $\frac{1}{2}$ second) appears horizontally. The blue wheel will automatically spin as well. The number on the blue side lets you know how much time will be required to capture an image with the same light value as the version without the filter. Use that as a **STARTING POINT** and adjust based on how the image turn up.



- Completely different mood with the 10-stop ND; ripples (and reduction of reflections) were distracting to me. I knew I had a 10-stop ND filter that would help me capture an image that better reflected my mood.
- Soft reflections
- Very moody, ethereal, foreboding, mysterious
- Indistinct, soft (higher f-stop...) a lot left to imagination
- Still linear but pulls you into fog; three layers, two subjects (sailboat and fog);
- This is how I was feeling....



My most common shooting mode:

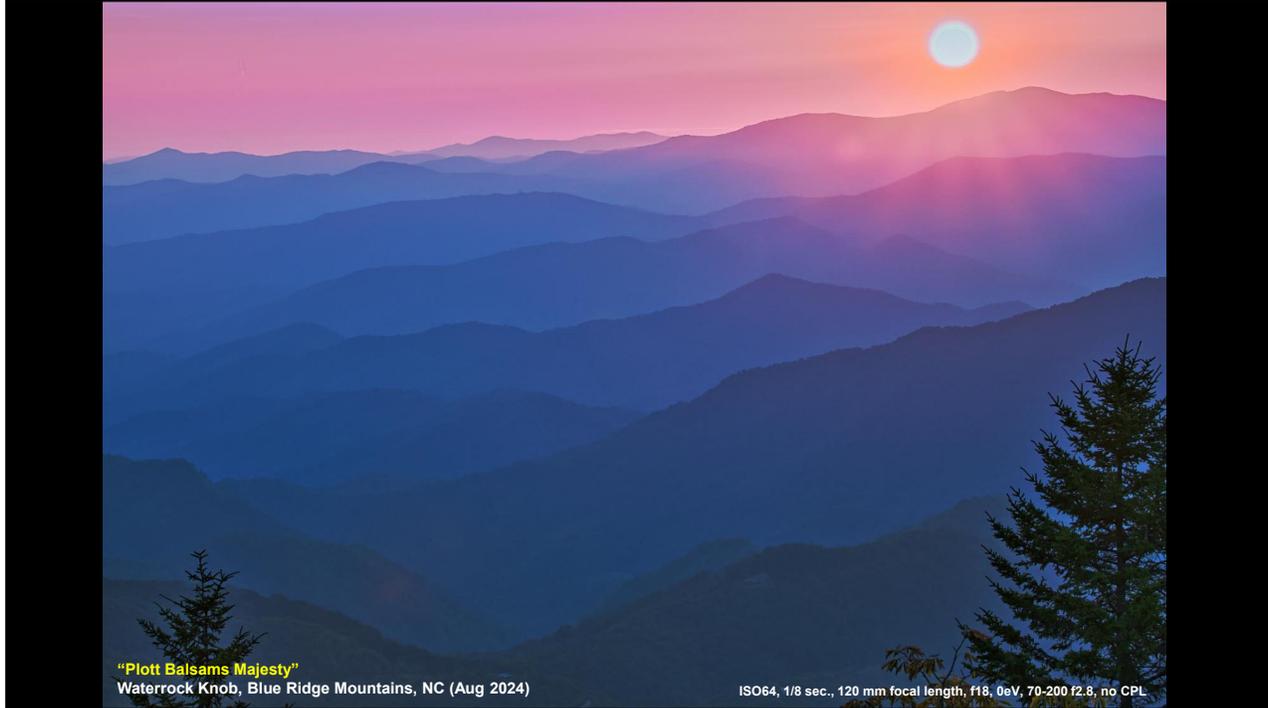
– **Manual**

- Forces me to be patient!
- Plenty of time to setup
- Waterfalls I usually shoot 1/5 sec or slower (generally prefer slower for “curtains”)
- Matrix metering most common to consider lighting of entire scene
- Blue hour I RARELY use filters (I LOVE the reflections!)

- If you don't already know what the various light metering modes are for your camera, **READ YOUR CAMERA USERS MANUAL**. All manufacturers describe that function specific to your camera. Same thing.. Different names by various manufacturers.



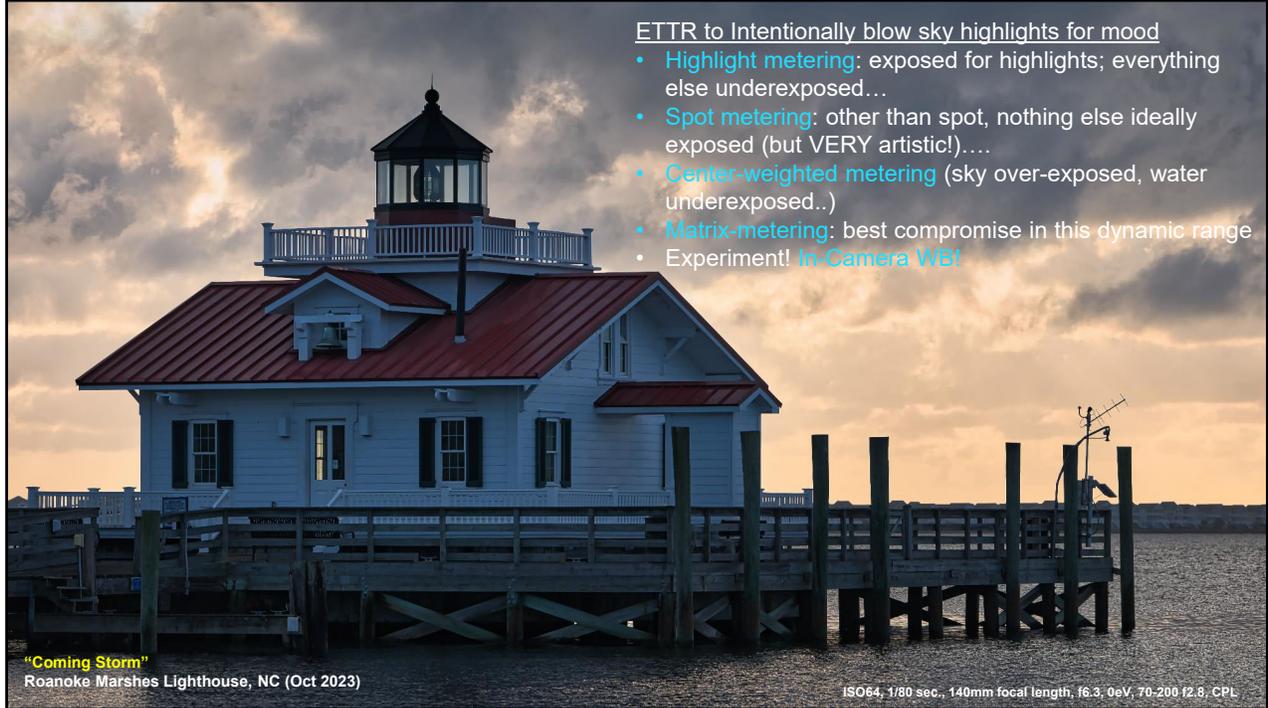
- 10-stop ND filter here flattened out the waves giving them more of an ethereal feel to it and streaked the clouds a little.. Another storm front had just passed so the lighting was very dramatic. Don't get intimidated by the weather! Inclement weather is fantastic ("anyone can shoot in the sun"...)
- Check your camera to see if it is weather sealed/weatherproof. If not consider purchasing a cover



- Planning is key at Waterrock Knob. There are sweeping views, but the best layered views are toward the west so must wait until sunset.. But because of it, you can expect multiple photographers/tourists so need to find and stake out your claim...
- If you go for sunset, if you are in the Milky Way season, stay if the skies are clear! You can capture some fantastic Milky Way images up there as the light pollution is lower. To the naked eye, it will just appear like a cloudy band.. But when you develop your image...
- For starbursts use higher f-stop values (but recognize that $\geq f16$ your image may suffer some softening at the edges due to light diffraction). Lower f-stops can also generate star burst (e.g. f5.6) but that appears with longer exposures.
- Can get cool and controlled sun flaring if you place the sun near an edge (described later). I think it can be pretty cool. A lens hood is great to help reduce it (in addition to a CPL), but if you want to encourage it, remove that lens hood and your filter (the more glass elements there are in front of the sensor, the greater the propensity for the sunlight to reflect . Just have to play around with the direction you point the camera in terms of how much flaring you want. But it's really easy to get and easy to control.



- An average composition can suddenly transform into a compelling one with inclement weather. But use the mood to guide your camera settings. If I used $>1/125^{\text{th}}$ of a sec (e.g. faster than $1/500^{\text{th}}$) I would have frozen individual drops which would have dramatically changed the mood. By using $1/125^{\text{th}}$ of a sec shutter speed I could capture the rain just quick enough to show motion (making it clear it was rain and that it was heavy), and communicate that moody look. Slower than $1/125^{\text{th}}$ shutter speed it would just start giving it more of a foggy look.
- Waterfalls are fantastic, but don't forget to turn around and look downstream!! It's pretty down there too! Downstream you have the leading lines of the stream/river channel. Or, go downstream within the stream itself (if safe) and face toward the falls to give a different perspective.. Get closer to the water..
- Snow you can use slower shutter speeds to communicate the same effect as rain; the snow on the ground will communicate clearly it's snowing out.
- If you want to make the waterfalls form a full curtain (like I prefer), 10 sec or more almost guarantees it. You may have to use your ND filter during the day or wait until blue hours to get long exposures.



- “ETTR”: Expose To The Right (practice of lifting the exposure so that the histogram curve is weighted on the right (highlights) side but just far enough that it doesn’t blow/clip the highlights). It will improve your chances of recovering shadows without as much noise (you just decrease the exposure of the shadows in post).
- I ultimately selected matrix metering for the above image. In the various Nikon metering modes, this is what would have happened to the image in terms of exposure.
- READ YOUR MANUAL – know what each of the cameras metering modes are and what each one does.
- You can play around with your in-camera white balance. Can do it in post as well, but something to think about. For example, If you select an incandescent lighting white balance (warm tone), your camera will automatically introduce some blue to counteract the yellow hues to get you back to 18% gray and return whites to white. For fun, I also selected an incandescent white balance setting that automatically shifted the hue in the blue (cooler) hues. You can do this in post as well, or, if you made a mistake and forgot to fix your white balance your processing software definitely will



"The Dawning Stag"
Waynesville, NC (Aug 2024)

ISO64, 1.3sec, 155mm focal length, f13, 0eV, 70-200 f2.8, CPL



"Tower in the Mist"
Waynesville, NC (Aug 2024)

ISO64, ½ sec, 200mm focal length, f11, 0eV, 70-200 f2.8; No CPL



"Morning at Mabry Mill"
Mabry Mill", Blue Ridge Parkway, Virginia (Oct, 2023)

ISO720, 1/13 sec, 65mm focal length, f4, 0eV, 24-70 f2.8, CPL

Composition Planning and Adjustments

– Upon arriving at the site:

- Confirm previsualizations
- Leave the camera in the bag & walk around!
- Find inspiration, don't force it
- Upon finding composition, evaluate scene. Determine how you want to lead the viewer through the image
- Adjust tripod position/height to optimize **perspectives**
 - Perspective can make or break an image
 - So can wrong focal length!



- Be DELIBERATE in your composition. However, do recognize that sometimes you may not know exactly *why* you were compelled to capture an image..
- Perspective can make or break an image. Previsualization onsite with a camera can really be essential to help you identify the ideal composition
- May need to move forward, back, up, or down, or flip to the other orientation (vertical vs. horizontal) to get the view right. All elements in the image are very much intentional
- I wanted the viewer to move through the image starting in the lower right. This is normally a pond so it was a treat it was just a stream with a lovely leading line.
- Did NOT want fences either perpendicular (or close to it), or too obtuse; if the former, the leading line is a blockade; if the latter, it may lead you off the image; choose fencing to lead the viewer through the image in the direction you want them to be lead.
- The lines and arrows show the direction I wanted the viewer to work their way through the image. The curvature of the fence at upper left NEEDED to roughly match that of the curve of the road so it would suggest a repeating patters and keep your eye moving
- I used color contrasting or linear items to encourage visual direction changes
- Photograph rural structures at between 40-50 degrees facing one of the corners to maximize the size of the building. Be cautious if there's a strong linear

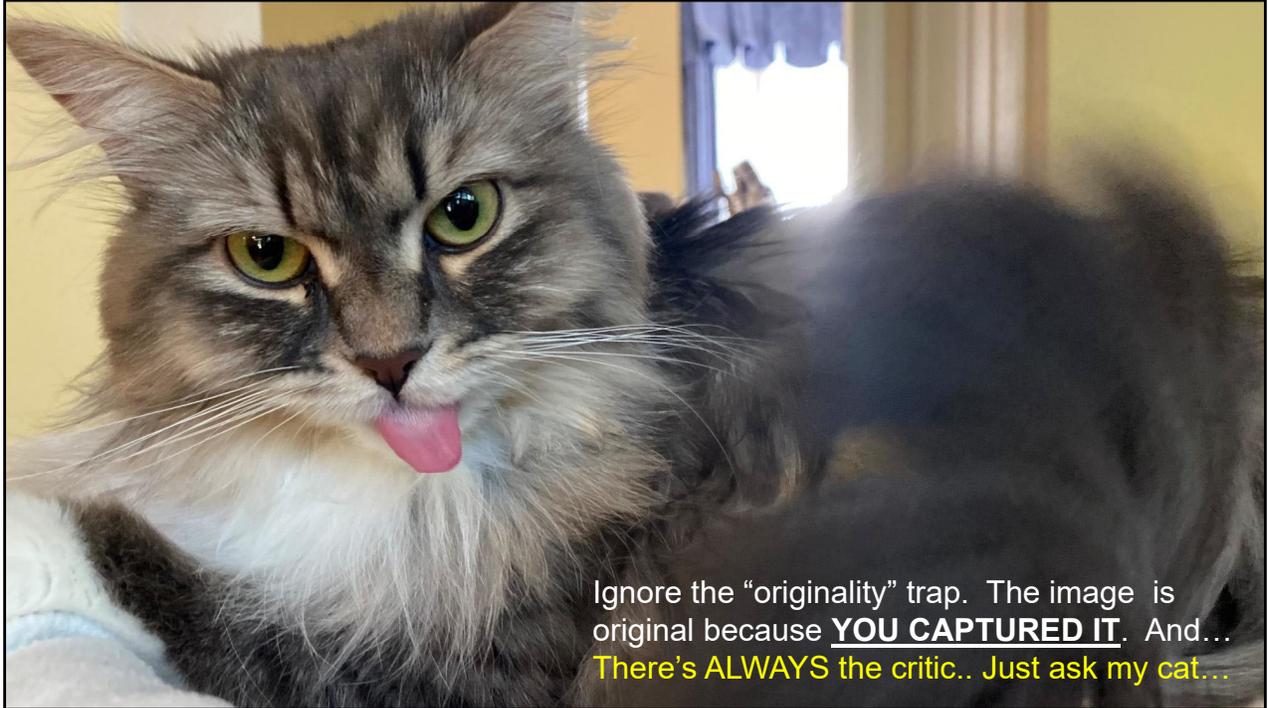
element (e.g. flume); too acute an angle it can just look displeasing

- Use implied leading lines.
- Start with your focal point and then build outward from there and either introduce items that enhance it, or crop inward to eliminate distracting elements
- I shoot to crop a little. ALWAYS. So, give yourself just enough room to crop as you may get back home wishing that had you just pulled out a little more...
- Use natural features to block out unwanted items whenever possible.. See the ugly picnic area in the image or did you overlook it? Used color and perspective to slightly combine two support posts on the canopy such that they had the same general colors and width as the trees they lie between. The net effect was that it reduced the visual weight of the item .
- Took me about 45 minutes to refine my vertical/horizontal position once I found my general composition via previsualization with my cell phone before I could start shooting.

Sunrise/Sunset Tips and Tricks

- Base ISO (if calm conditions).. No reason not to...
- Turn off ALL Vibration Reduction when on tripod (lens and/or body)
- Don't wait until sunrise/sunset to start shooting... or leave site too early!
- ND filters generally redundant at either sunrise or sunset.. CPL doesn't really do much in blue hours (except make you lose the beautiful reflections!)
- Use your cell phone/apps to previsualize.
- For a little sun flaring, put the sun closer to the edges with NO FILTERS to take advantage of maximum lens curvature/glass deflection; combine with high f-stop
 - But without filters: DO NOT put the sun in the center!! Your sensor says: "Nooo! Hellp Meee!"

- If conditions are windy and you want to freeze the vegetation, try bumping up ISO a little first to see if you can get up to 1/60th or faster. Otherwise, open up the aperture and take the hyperfocal distances into account
- Vibration Reduction is a gyroscopic device that has an accelerometer which is collectively powered by your camera to keep some of the glass elements more stable. It detects and attempts to counteract camera motion; however, there is some base "noise". So if you leave VR on, it is possible the VR will actually INTRODUCE apparent camera shake. Better to leave it off and just use a timer on your camera and/or remote shutter. In body stabilization can be disabled through the menus of each camera. Or you can assign one of the custom buttons to do this for you without having to



- How many times have you heard: “Oh, that image isn’t original! There’s thousands of photos of that”. Yes... it is most definitely original. You captured it. It has your slightly different artistic spin on it. The lighting conditions were slightly different and therefore, each is unique as lighting makes the image. Someone told me that an image wasn’t original (Columbia River Gorge) simply because the Columbia River Gorge is one of the most photographed spots in Oregon... made me laugh.. There’s a REASON why there are so many images made by so many professional photographers.. It’s beautiful. My images are unique because I was the artist who captured them. Simple as that. I didn’t try to duplicate someone else’s style (photography or editing).