



Landscape Photography

Joshua sunset

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“In landscape photography the best time to shoot great images is at sunrise and sunset. The time in between is known as breakfast, lunch and nap-time.”

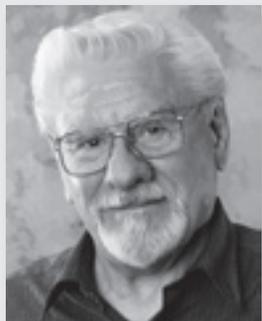
The time to get ready for landscape photography is here! What is there to get ready for? Just go? Well, there are “snapshot” outings, and then there are “landscape” opportunities. If the plan is to create fine art examples, or images worthy of entering into competition your chances of doing that are compromised by the hard realities of the situation. Organization and discipline is required for basic landscape photography to be successful, and considerable thought must go into the selection of equipment and planning the activities so as to provide assurance that the “landscape” efforts will be successful. This article deals primarily with an aspect of landscape photography that only Mother Nature has control of—the quality of light, and how to use it to your best advantage.

Planning for each session, and sharing the experience with others multiplies the value of it, however, each photographer must have the “time and space” when the shooting starts to concentrate on camera settings, lens changes, and when to use a tripod. Expect that configuration changes will be dictated by rapidly changing light values, and because of this a person should be totally familiar with the operation of their camera, have an appropriate selection of lenses, and be able to

use techniques such as *Overlay-Multiple Exposure Mode (OME)*, and application of *Graduated Neutral Density Filters (GND)*. A “dry-run” close to home at sunrise or sunset can be enormously beneficial in preparing one for the main event far from home.

Wide-angle lenses are favored for the early part of the shoot, followed by normal to medium telephoto lenses when narrow perspective and foreshortening is desired. Lens combinations that cover 24 to 200 mm will normally suffice. Compositional elements that introduce foreground, middle ground, and background objects provide perspective and give the picture depth and reality. “Impact” from colorful subjects, observation of the *rule of thirds*, and *leading lines* provided by natural objects and terrain, high-resolution foreground objects, and great depth-of-field can result in a landscape picture that leads the viewer on a visual journey. Some images may tax the viewer’s ability to perceive the relationships within the scene, and there needs to be a clue the eye and mind can relate to. That’s when a familiar object, such as a small image of a person, or other familiar object, can provide scale to the scene. When it’s done right the image “pops” into reality as the mind interprets the 2D visual information as a 3D image, and the experience is one of the viewers bonding with the picture.

Allow thirty minutes before official sunrise to get in place and setup in the dark, because at the



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beginning of the day the magic light follows the faint light of dawn as the sun shines up underneath the clouds from below the horizon. That's when the colors of the clouds change from purple and vermillion to red, orange, and yellow. If you are shooting a digital camera in JPEG mode, and have the ability to select white balance set it to "open shade" to maximize the color saturation. If you have the option to shoot in RAW mode you don't have to worry about setting white balance because the RAW image is not processed in-camera. That will be done when the image file is handled in the computer. It's after that, that the desired white balance of the RAW image can be manually manipulated. Most DSLR's provide the option of shooting in RAW mode with a JPEG backup as an option. If that dual mode is selected, set the white balance for the JPEG backup because it will be processed in-camera even though the RAW images are not. Remember that a JPEG processed in-camera has exposure latitude of only 1 to 2 f-stops, and therefore has a much narrower range of manipulation than a RAW image, which has about 3 to 4 f-stops latitude

It's surprising how long the sunrise seems to take, and then how quickly the light changes as the first rays from the sun illuminate the sky above the horizon, then shine up under the clouds in the sky. This only lasts for a few minutes and you may think its over, but it's not. Once the orb of the sun is above the horizon, check out what's happening behind you. If there are any hills or mountains there, the tops will start turning orange due to the sun shining through a hundred miles of microscopic particles in the earth's atmospheric layer, where the short blue wavelengths of light are attenuated while the longer red wavelengths cut through the haze. You can watch for this and capture the bright orange color of the light as it moves down the mountain. As the sunlight illuminates everything below the horizon in its warm golden light, long shadows will appear to add other dimensions to the images.

The first images will probably have to be taken in very low light levels, which require long exposure times, so it's advisable to mount the camera on a tripod. It's preferable to use Aperture Priority (A) to lock in the desired f-stop, and a setting between f-8 and f-16 is generally required for maximum depth-of-field. In this mode the camera will automatically select the best shutter speed. The Histogram becomes a valuable tool for compensating the exposure under these conditions. Use it to make sure the exposure fits between the tone values of 10 to 250. Data should not pile up at either end of the histogram, and if it does that means the shadows will be blocked up and/or the highlights will be blown out.

It's difficult to capture detail in the foreground,



Poplars at St. Andrews

but that's what makes a great sunrise/sunset picture. That's where the Overlay/Multiple Exposure mode (OME), or the Graduated Neutral Density filters (GND) come into play. If you've never had an opportunity to use OME mode or GND filters here's what it's all about. Wherever

Bishop Fall colors



you see bright colorful skies and dark foregrounds with only silhouettes in them, or the sky has weak colors and the foreground has blocked up shadows and poor detail, the picture needs the GND or OME assistance. The OME usage is generally limited to images where there is nothing in motion because the procedure is to take two identical pictures, with one exposure for the sky, the other for the foreground, and combine them to get the best of each onto one image. The rectangular GND filter is placed in a slotted holder screwed onto the lens filter ring and can be used for single image landscapes as well as action shots to “hold back” the sky to allow a better exposure of the foreground. These filters come in soft and hard transitions, and 1, 2, or 3 degrees (f-stops) of shading. If you can only afford one get the #2-H,

When the sun has topped the haze layer, and the entire area is bathed in sunlight it’s time to go to breakfast, take a nap, or go shoot slot canyons—the magic light is gone until sunset.

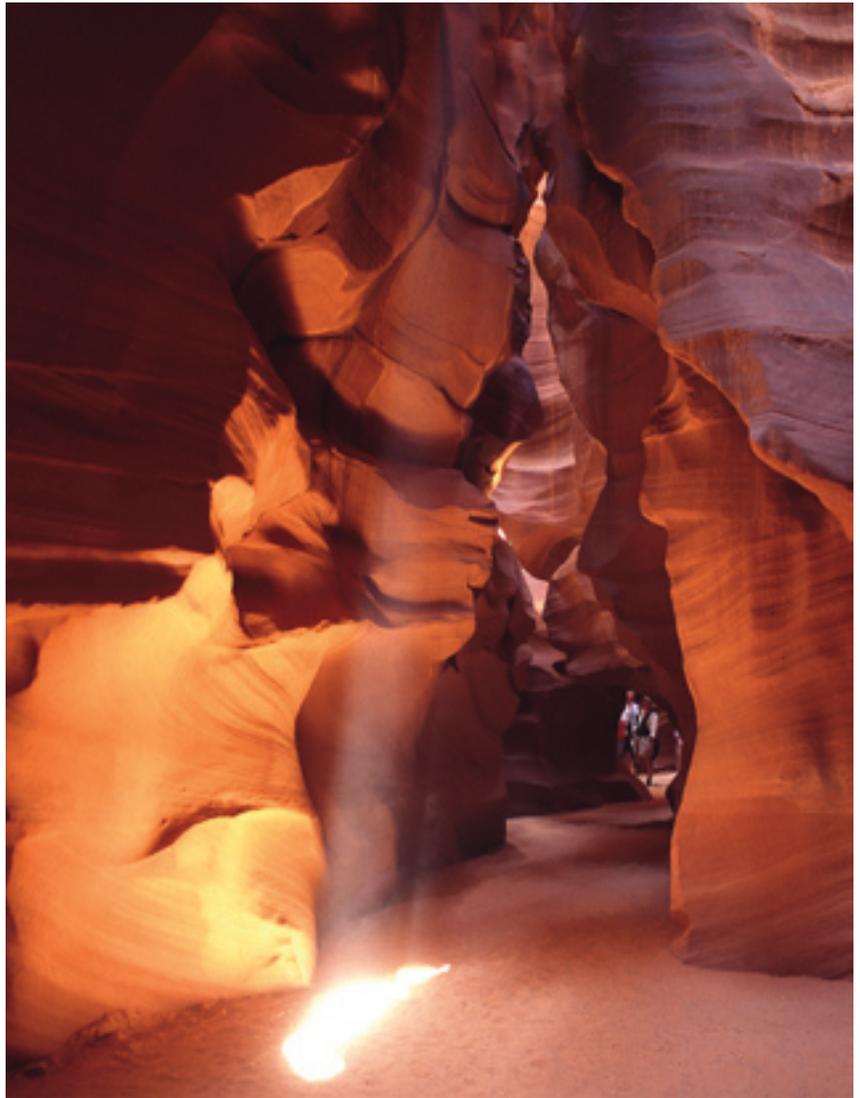
As you would expect, sunset shooting is basically the reverse of sunrise shooting, however, each event has its own special light that’s dependent upon the cloud cover and the increased amount of haze in the atmosphere at the end of the day’s weather activities. One needs to arrive shortly before published sunset, but this time the setup can be done in the light of day. The tripod is advisable again because shooting will be done from daylight into darkness, and the camera’s settings may require a change, as it gets darker. In this situation increase your camera’s ISO if you have to, in a third way to achieve a correct exposure, and don’t give up or pack up until it’s really dark! Sometimes the best opportunities occur just before it’s too dark to navigate without lights. Again, check for the bright orange light that will be going *up* the mountains behind the photographer.

In the interest of capturing these fleeting images the photographer should have ready reference to the times of sunrise and sunset. Being aware of this is necessary to arrive at a “photography confluence,” the coming together of time, place, and favorable characteristics of light that allows for the creation of memorable images.

After the light is finally gone it’s time for dinner, downloads, back-ups, and critiquing the results of the day’s work. That effort invariably produces great improvements on the second day. ■

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Slot Canyon



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