

Backpacking with a Camera

Training test

I recently made up my mind that it was high time I stretched my photographic wings. And since I have always been fond of backpacking (it was an Outward Bound backpacking trip that first introduced me to the beautiful Pacific Northwest), I grabbed my SLR camera and headed toward the hills.

Whether you are planning a day hike or an overnight adventure, this article features a few of the most helpful tips to keep in mind when taking your camera up into the high country.



Mt Shuksan and Flowers
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Morning in the Mountains
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Tip One: Pack Light; Pack Right

Resist the urge to bring ALL of your equipment. Select one camera body and, at most, two lenses. You may even want to limit yourself to a compact camera with manual controls (the Rollei 35 has been a classic favorite of backpackers for years).



Fording the Brook
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Weight is always an issue when backpacking. Especially when you are doing an overnight excursion, you will be required to carry many pounds of gear just for cooking, sleeping, etc. The last thing that you want to do (believe me because I speak from experience) is add too many pounds of camera gear that you won't end up using. This only causes unnecessary aches and pains.

So planning ahead, picking one kind of photography and limiting the amount of equipment you bring will only help you.

Try to think of the kind of images you want to bring home from this outdoor adventure. This will simplify your experience and increase the likelihood of your getting maximum return on investment. The limited weight you carry will return the most amount of winning pictures when you do this kind of planning ahead and previsualizing, as Ansel Adams would call it.

Whatever you do, though, do not leave your tripod behind. If your tripod is too heavy, buy a new, lightweight version. This tool is simply too essential to not have on hand.

Tip Two: Stay Warm and Look for Warm Colors

Most of nature is green, blue, and brown. Have an eagle-like eye watching for a spot of color - like red, orange, or yellow. When you spot it, hone in and see what you can do with it.

If it is too small - like a tiny wildflower - you may have to walk away without shooting (unless you happen to have a macro lens with you). Keep looking until you find enough color to fill the frame or otherwise make it play a big part in your image. Alternatively, you can attempt to arrange a few bits of color into a thoughtful, well-organized composition.

Also, the sky can offer you some beautifully warm colors as long as you play the game and time things just right. Get up early stay out late... be prepared to shoot during sunrise and sunset. Set up your tent early and be done with the dinner meal in time to take advantage of the high alpine sunset light and aspen glow.

Stay warm by bringing a sleeping pad and a good sleeping bag (check out [REI](#) for great backpacking and camping gear). This way, you will get good sleep and that will in turn help you wake up early enough to get the warm sunrise sky colors.



Yellow Flower Echo
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Tip Three: Include Signs of Human Life



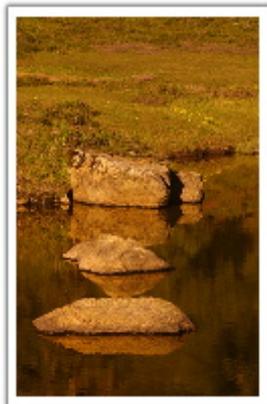
Fly Fisherman
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Many people seem to assume that people are simply not allowed in the photos taken in natural settings. While great images can indeed be comprised entirely of all-natural ingredients, photos that show human involvement can be equally engaging (if not more engaging) for your viewers. Instead of steering clear of all signs of the existence of humans, include people in at least a few of your photos. Let your co-backpackers walk ahead and then make a few photos of them in action. These will add great variety and interest to your resulting collection of images.

Likewise, if you see others enjoying the great outdoors, as this fly fisherman, go ahead and take your best shot.

Tip Four: Emulate the Masters

The following two examples show the difference between static vs. diagonal image design. Note the increased dynamism and energy in the image where the rocks have been laid out in a diagonal pattern.



Static Rocks



Three Rocks
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If you want to learn how to make better photos, pick one master photographer that you admire and try to copy their style. Now, I know that this kind of statement always triggers a knee-jerk reaction - after all, nobody wants to be accused of plagiarism. But don't worry about it. Your motives here are to learn and improve - not to steal and sell. It is actually a big compliment to the artist. Furthermore, your work - if approached honestly and thoughtfully - is bound to end up as your own original work of art. It is very unlikely that you will be able to actually replicate the original artist's work. If you do come too close, just refrain from trying to sell the image. Keep it as your own personal tribute.

Tip Five: Focus on the Details

In addition to shooting the sweeping panoramic vistas, make several detail shots.

The details are often all you need to capture the essence of the adventure or the spirit of the place. The tiniest of subjects can sometimes evoke the most suggestive memories.

These detail photos can be close-up, macro work or images made with more normal lenses. All that really matters is that you fill the frame with the one detail that most interests you.



Aqua
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There you have it... this will get you started in the right direction. Combine these photo tips with good common sense and you can both have a great adventure and capture it accurately on film. Expect the best, prepare for the worst... and the trails will bring you great joy and excellent photographs.



Truly Roughing It
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