

A Song for the Asking
The Electronic Newsletter of
EarthSong Photography
and

EarthSong Photography Workshops: Walking in Beauty

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Hello to All:

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Watching the River Run

For the last time they entreat us not to go on, and tell us that it is madness to set out in this place; that we can never get safely through it; and, further, that the river turn again to the south into the granite.... Some tears are shed; it is rather a solemn parting; each party thinks the other is taking the dangerous course.

John Wesley Powell

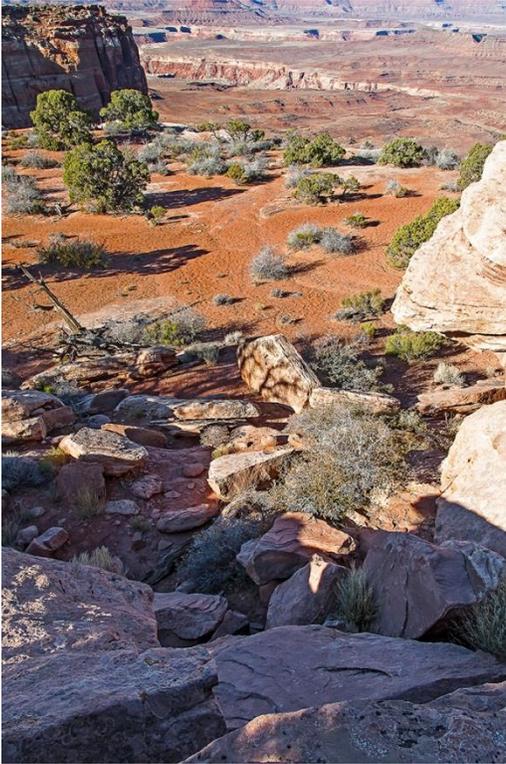
from *Diary of the First Trip Through the Grand Canyon*

Outside the front entrance of the Powell Museum in Page, Arizona, underneath a small portico and suspended a few feet off the concrete floor, there hangs a wooden boat. It looks pretty much like what it is, a sixteen-foot rowboat with perhaps a bit more freeboard than usual, constructed of pine: light; solid; decked bow, stern, and mid-ship; but somewhat blocky in appearance. The after-decking is raised perhaps 10" higher than the forward decks so that the sternman is higher than the rowers to provide him with a greater visual advantage. As you approach the craft you see a small wooden sign with the words "**Emma Dean**" in bolder and larger font, and below them a brief account that this is a replica of **John Wesley Powell's** pilot boat, named to honor his wife, on his first voyage, in 1869, through the depths of that great chasm we call the Grand Canyon. The word "replica" is not to be taken lightly, for the whereabouts of the original is unknown. Unknown because Powell left the good Emma Dean alongside the raging waters of the Colorado River at a stop he had christened as "Separation Rapids."



It was the same place that had precipitated the words above, written in Powell's diary under the date of August 28th. On that day, three of his crew, **O.G. Howland**, his brother **Seneca Howland**, and

William Dunn, men who had shared the perils and the rewards of that sublime adventure from way



An Island in the Sky

beginning of the endeavor; and, of course, **George Bradley**, become river paddler extraordinaire, the Massachusetts man, who knew boats and whose physical strength alone saved him in the rapids encountered on the same day below Separation, which were, by all telling, much more daunting than the upstream cataract could ever have been, were pushing off to die, or to complete their journey down the great unknown. The tenth member of their original company, **Frank Goodman**, had left the crew in early-July when they had stopped on the Green River at the mouth of the Uinta so that they could obtain some fresh supplies at the Uinta Indian Agency.

Powell had left the Emma Dean above Separation Rapid on the outside chance that the three breakaways would reconsider, or be blocked by the canyon and, finding the way out onto the North Rim impossible, return to the river to join them downstream.

It was the sad misfortune of the three to have cleared the North Rim only to be killed three days later in the desert by Shivwits Paiute Indians, apparently in an act of revenge, mistaking the adventurers for miners who had raped a Paiute woman.

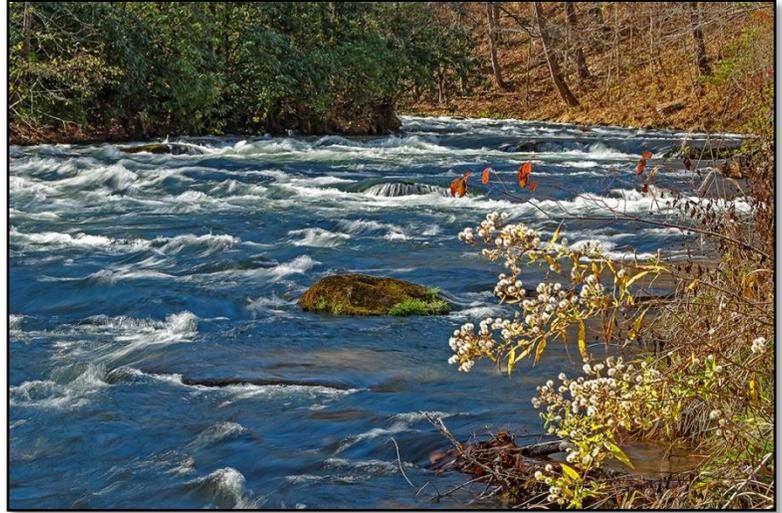
As for the Emma Dean, she is not known to have been seen again. Perhaps she was the victim of some cataclysmic rise in the level of the great stream in the wake of some torrential storm. It is not likely that Indians of any of the local tribes would have come to that part of the mighty rupture looking for anything. There is no indication that subsequent river runners ever came across her in whole or in part; and perhaps now that Separation is covered by the risen waters of Lake Mead, it is the silted sediments of that great mud puddle alone that know her ultimate fate.

Of John Wesley and Emma Dean Powell, history has kindly bequeathed us a great deal more; and while some may wish to consider him in the last analysis a mere bureaucratic scientific administrator, I believe that a fair reading of his life's accomplishments will more readily place him in that group of worthies greatly appreciated for their contributions to the cause of conservation.

There is something magical, mysterious, and marvelous about exploring a river by boat, even more so when the river being explored is, in the main, unknown. I recall with much satisfaction the first time I paddled a whitewater stream, the Nantahala, in Western North Carolina's amazing mountains: the excitement, the anticipation, the trepidation even, the joy of sensing the river beneath me as it pulsed

and moved to rhythms and laws I could barely imagine, seeking its own level, determined by gravity to find level wherever it could, relentless in its effort to do so, unconscious of the burden presented to it by the presence of my small craft, knowing only its great rhythmic self as it had for eons untold.

Of course, by then there had been many, many paddlers of the “Nanny,” likely many thousands; and her turns and drops and riffles were well known. Who knows what Archaic adventurer, braced in some hollowed out log, was the first to test the river’s current and from what inspiration, or what motivation, his journey was derived. I was simply glad to become a member of his fraternity. As far as the Caucasian branch of the group was concerned, it was, perhaps, some Spanish soldier traveling with de Soto in 1640 who thumbed a dugout ride with a Tsalagi



Running in the Steps of Patton

warrior to have the first honor. Or maybe it was a Scots-Irish trapper many years later exploiting the wealth of the great eastern woods. It is so remote now as to be lost to the mists of time.

In the intervening years I have paddled a few streams – the Ocoee, the Hiawasse, the Chattahoochee, the New, the Chattooga – to recall some of them, all in the Southeast. What can be said of all is that they amount to a tempest in a teapot in comparison to the Colorado and its tributaries; but they are enough to have given me an appreciation for the adventures of John Wesley Powell, who as far as we

know was the first Caucasian to descend the mighty Colorado; he and his crew the first White men to see up close the incredible power and ferocity and outright beauty of that river’s awesome dash through the lower reaches of the Colorado Plateau before it spends itself into a meandering valley river on its way to the Gulf of California.

In 1866-67, when Wes Powell began planning in earnest for his information-gathering adventure, the main part of the Colorado River watershed had been a possession of the United States for a mere twenty years; much of the drainage, which includes nearly all of the Colorado Plateau, was unknown; and in those two scant



Calf Creek and Nearly Escalante

decades little had been done to expand that base of knowledge. America at war with itself from 1861-1865 was part of the reason; the conditions on the ground in the region itself accounted for another part. It is an arid and harsh land by any definition, proving quickly and beyond any doubt that lushness and moisture are only one pair of many possible criteria by which natural beauty might be measured; and it is a very large, arid, harsh landscape on top of that. The Colorado drains 246,000 square miles of the American Southwest, making it the seventh largest watershed on the North American continent; and even though the headwaters of its two major branches are formed high in the alpine fastness of the Colorado (Never-Summer Mountains) and Wyoming (Wind River Range) Rockies, at 10,000' and 8,000' respectively, most of its run is through the dry boulders and canyons of

of the upper and lower plateau regions of the drainage.

A word on names is important here. Until 1921 the term “Colorado” was applied only to that part of the stream below the junction with the Green. Above that joiner, the upstream river was known as the Grand. Thus it had been that the Grand from Colorado and the Green from Wyoming came together to form the Colorado River in what is now the majesty of Canyonlands National Park, Utah.

In that year the Honorable **Edward T. Taylor**, (D) Colorado, allowed his ego to get the best of him. He had been a Member of Congress from his state since 1909, and the fact that the river named Colorado did not actually begin until it was well beyond the boundaries of the jurisdiction bothered him greatly; he did, in fact, consider it an “abomination.” He had served as Chairman of the Committee on the Irrigation of Arid Lands previously, and was not without some influence. So he introduced a resolution before the Congressional Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce to completely rename the Grand as the Colorado, and on July 25 the change was



made official by House Joint Resolution 460 of the 66th Congress. It is worthwhile to note that this occurred over the objections of the representatives from Wyoming, Utah, and the United States Geological Survey. Taylor’s renamed river thus became the Colorado all the way from La Poudre Pass to Isla Montague (thanks to the acquiescence of the government of Mexico).

It might be noted, as the USGS pointed out in 1921, that though the Green River at its confluence carries a slightly smaller volume of water than the Grand, it carries a greater siltation burden; and its

drainage is about 70% larger than the Grand’s and many miles longer. Still, it’s now the Colorado, above and below the junction, all the way up and down; but if I inadvertently use the name Grand, you’ll know what I mean.

John Wesley Powell was born on March 24, 1834 in Mount Morris, New York, in the far west central part of the state, where the glacially scoured stream valleys gave rise to the Finger Lakes. His parents **Joseph**, an itinerant Methodist preacher, and **Mary** had come to this country only four years earlier from England. By the time young Wes was sixteen, the family had migrated briefly through Jackson, Ohio into Walworth County, Wisconsin



Looking at Mesa Through Arch

before settling in Boone County, Illinois immediately below the state line from Walworth County. As with his two brothers and two sisters, as with most every nineteenth-century frontier child similarly situated, the work of surviving on the output of a small family homestead was long and hard. The stories that have come to us of the **Abe Lincolns** and **John Muirs** of the time were played out with equal earnestness and acuity in the youth of John Wesley Powell. What education there was to be had had to be worked in around fifteen-hour work days that were physically demanding as well as lengthy.

He had been fortunate at a younger age, during the family's time in Ohio, to have come under the influence of **George L. Crookham**, a self-taught man of science who had done well as a farmer and an early manufacturer of salt, and who had created a small museum at his home, which was filled with natural history objects as well as a scientific library of which he was justly proud. Attached to the museum he had built a room in which he taught any young man who wished to learn. John Wesley Powell was an eager student. Crookham's impact upon the budding scholar would be long-lived, and the desire for scientific knowledge and understanding he instilled in Wes would grow into a fire that would burn intensely throughout Powell's life. Perhaps it was Crookham's sway that birthed in Powell a restlessness to see the natural world around him. Whatever the source, from our earliest descriptions of him, he seems to have been a young man possessed of a wandering spirit and a desire to discover.

Powell's love of nature and science soon enough pointed him in those directions as areas of academic interest and further study, which set him at odds with his father's wish that he should enter the ministry. The impasse meant that his college education would be entirely at his own expense.

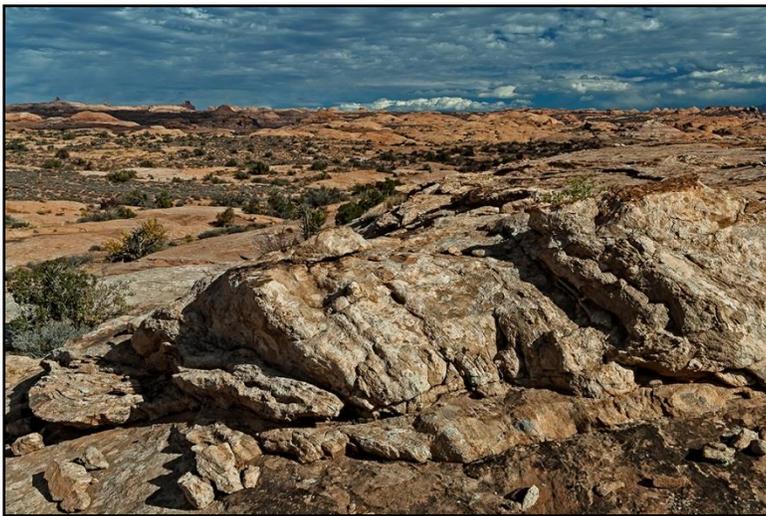
At this point in his life, however, education would have to co-exist with adventure and what he might discover of natural history. In order to raise the money he needed for college he, from the time he was eighteen, took jobs teaching in schools in the area. When he could matriculate, he first tried the newly established Illinois Institute, a school that ultimately failed financially and was reborn as Wheaton College in 1860. There he discovered not a single science course being offered. At twenty, he spent a



Approaching the Fiery Furnace

year at Illinois College, but left in 1855 to

go on a four-month ramble across Wisconsin collecting specimens of fossils and flora as he went. In 1857 he returned to Illinois Institute, but for only a year before enrolling at Oberlin. The circumstances of Powell's time in that Ohio institution are somewhat unclear, but he left after only one term, having availed himself of courses in Greek and Latin. What he seems to have taken away from this Trans-Midwestern educational odyssey is that there were no schools of the day readily equipped with science and natural history offerings; but since his finances would not allow him a broader experience, he was left to learn mostly on



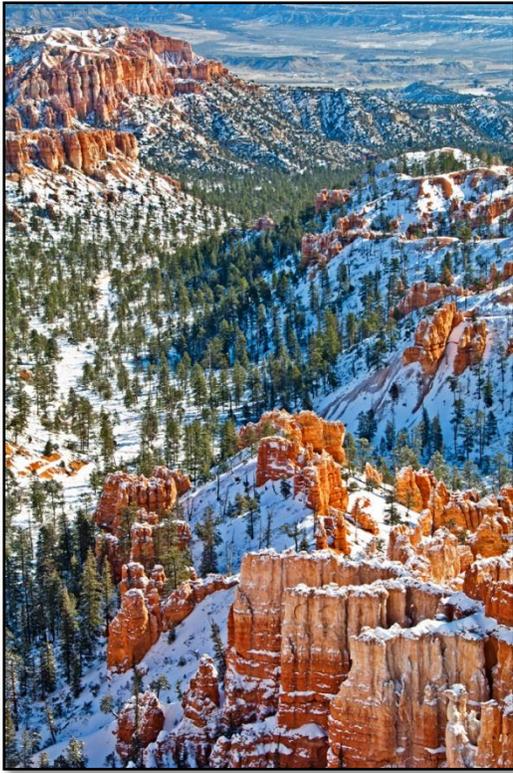
Across a Field of Navajo Sandstone

his own the sciences and mathematics he so earnestly craved.

On a spring morning in 1856, Powell untethered his bobbing skiff below the base of the historically significant Falls of St. Anthony and sat to row. In that same year the Minnesota Territorial Legislature authorized the establishment of a town on the falls' west bank on land obtained through pressure by the United States Government from the Mdewakanton Dakota who had lived near this sacred place

for many years, their ancestors having migrated from the lower piedmont and coastal plains of what is now South Carolina. This town, where Fort Snelling had recently stood, would grow up to be the City of Minneapolis. By the time he finished rowing he was climbing out of the mighty river almost at the Gulf of Mexico in New Orleans.

This trek was just a warm-up for the following year when he would paddle from the confluence where



Inspiration from Above

his Illinois River adventure had begun. By the time of his prize-winning State Fair experience he had become the superintendent of Hennepin's schools.

During the summer of 1860 his recent naturalist-explorer experiences led him to try his hand on the regional lecture circuit, part of the then-popular lyceum movement, offering talks on geology and geography. He spent a couple of months trekking Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi; but perhaps the most significant understanding he took away from this was the realization that a war between the North and the South was inevitable.

On April 14, 1861, after 34 hours of bombardment by Confederate forces positioned around Charleston Harbor, Major **Robert Anderson** surrendered his garrison at Fort Sumter and the Civil War was on. Historians cite two different dates, April 14 and May 8, 1861 as enlistment dates in the Union Army by John Wesley Powell; perhaps the larger point is that, following his staunch abolitionist beliefs, his entering the cause of preserving the Union absent slavery came almost immediately after the conflict began. He entered service as a private with the 20th Illinois Infantry, but by June he had been commissioned as a second lieutenant; and by November, he was a captain, and his acquired knowledge of engineering and self-study of military tactics had landed him on General **Ulysses Grant**'s staff supervising artillery fortifications at Camp Girardeau, Missouri.

In that same month he was granted a short leave to go to Detroit. As it happened he had been courting his cousin Emma Dean since 1860, and now they were to be married. After the ceremony the couple returned to Cape Girardeau where Emma would remain until the army was ordered to move south. Until April 4, 1862, Pittsburg Landing had been a quiet, non-descript tavern operated by Pitts Tucker on the west bank of the Tennessee River in Hardin County, Tennessee. On that day two armies began maneuvering into positions not always clear to each other, or themselves. Two days later, firing would

the Allegheny and the Monongahela come together to create the Mississippi's largest tributary, which we know as the Ohio River, down that great stream to its mouth at Cairo, Illinois and then back up the Mississippi another 250 miles to St. Louis, Missouri. This journey was an imitation of the route taken by the earliest explorer-natural scientists to the region: **Lewis and Clark, Henry Schoolcraft, Thomas Nuttall, Maximilian of Wied-Neuwied** and his estimable artist, **Karl Bodmer**, all headed west to see what was there, like bears and mountains.

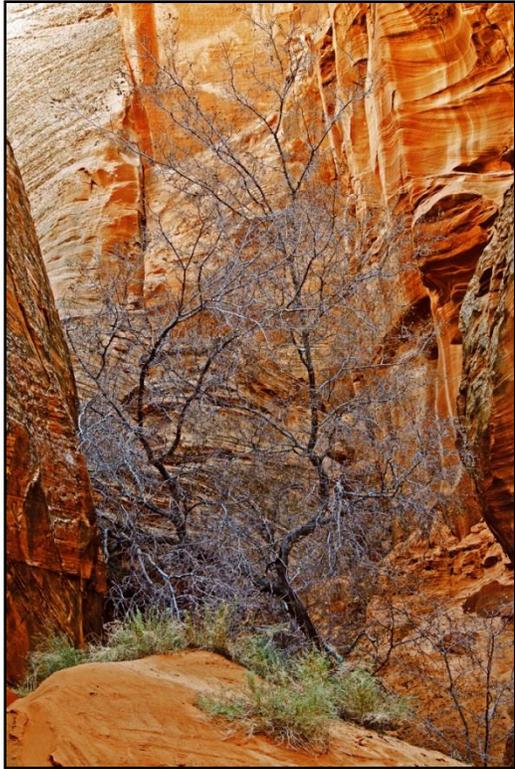
As if this were not sufficient, in 1858, for a longer period than his term at Oberlin, he paddled the Illinois River from its beginning at the confluence of the Des Plaines and the Kankakee, southwest of present-day Joliet, down to the Mississippi, up Old Man River and then upstream on the Des Moines River from its mouth northwestward into central Iowa as far as the confluence of Raccoon River near what is now downtown Des Moines; and, as always, collecting as he went. The quality and quantity of his efforts was recognized in 1860 at the Illinois State Agricultural Society Fair, where his mollusk collection won several prizes.

In 1858, he also began employment as a teacher in Hennepin, Illinois, a scant 75 miles downstream from where

commence, and by the time it had concluded on April 8, it would be the bloodiest battle in United States history to that point; forever to be known as Bloody Shiloh. On April 6, as Powell raised his right arm to signal “fire” to an artillery battery, a Minié ball smashed into it. Three days later, he would lose the arm from the elbow down, a wound that would cause intermittent pain for the rest of his life.

He could have seen the loss as a train ticket back to Hennepin; but he was back on active duty within several months and remained so for the duration of the war, participating in the Siege of Vicksburg, the Atlanta Campaign, and the Battle of Nashville, ultimately attaining for his service the rank of Major. In the trenches of Vicksburg he made a study of rocks and fossils in the various strata, which collection later became part of the Illinois State Museum.

With the war over Powell requested to resign his commission, permission for which was granted. Not



long after his discharge he received an appointment as a professor of geology at Illinois Wesleyan University, and he was invited the following year to lecture at Illinois State Normal University, which in 1868 became simply Illinois State University. He was also named curator of the Illinois Museum of Natural History with a small stipend from the Illinois Legislature.

Almost immediately two qualities came to stand out and can readily be seen as outgrowths of his earlier life and previous experiences. Powell, as we noted, had always loved to travel. As a teacher he approached his subjects with many of the same ideas that had been passed to him through his days as George Crookham’s student, which is to say that working in the field would always be preferable to being in a classroom. Combine the two and you have a professor who will look for ways to lead his students into the laboratory of nature whenever possible. Collecting in the field was invariably of great importance: fossils, minerals, plants, whatever could be gathered that might be of museum interest; and, always, the observations of creatures in their native habitats.

In 1867, Powell led a group of students to the Colorado Rockies on an observing and gathering expedition. Funds for the trip came from the Museum, the University of Illinois – at the time called Illinois Industrial University, and the

Not Brooklyn, But Growing

Chicago Academy of Science; and his agreement with the funding sources was to provide each of them with some of the fruits of the collecting. The Smithsonian Institution loaned him scientific instruments; he, in turn, agreed to provide topographic measurements. Powell convinced the railroads to provide free transportation, and he arranged to purchase rations at government rates from Army posts in route. It was a productive and successful venture for the group and for Powell, and it taught him much about the institutional politics of the organizations with which he worked and how to use that knowledge in future endeavors.

At the end of the summer most of the students returned to Illinois, but Wes and Emma Powell and a few others from the group remained in Colorado to explore Middle Park where the headwaters of the Grand River rushed from the Never Summer Mountains through Grand Lake and then skirted Hot Sulphur Springs in the beginning of its magnificent journey west.

The next summer, 1868, Wes and Emma, a group of students, and some of the Powells’ Illinois family and neighbors, calling themselves by the august name of the Rocky Mountain Scientific Exploring Expedition, returned to Colorado. As scientists, they were an unlikely assembly of self-taught, mid-western frontier folks, much like their leader; but they were intent in their mission. Trekking down the drainage of Clear Creek, they arrived at Empire where they rendezvoused with Jack Sumner,

whom Powell had met the previous year and who would serve not only as the guide for the remainder of their journey, but would also remain with the Major going forward into his gelling plan to explore the mysterious lands of the Colorado River below its junction with the Green: that awesome, parched, terrible, and beautiful uplift and cut down land of canyonlands and spires of the Colorado Plateau. Before any of this could come about there was collecting to be done and adventures to be had. Among their accomplishments, Powell and several of the others, including his brother Walter, the guide Sumner and his brother-in-law **William Byers** a Denver newspaperman, and three of the students achieved what is recorded as the first ascent of Long's Peak, the only 14,000' + peak in what is now Rocky Mountains National Park. And, of course, there were specimens to find and send to the museums in order to justify the monies they had received to finance their venture.

By October they had reached a point on the White River near the present town of Meeker, where they built cabins and prepared for winter.

During this winter of 1868-69 Powell ranged far and wide across an area west of the big mountains in the watersheds of the White, Yampa, Green, and Grand Rivers. He went beyond the Green itself and explored that odd blister on the land called the Uinta Mountains. Of all the majestic presence of the Rockies, the Uintas are the highest subrange in the Lower Forty-eight States which runs east-west.

This was not terra incognita, but neither was it a tourist destination. By the late-1860's there had been trappers and mountain men moving through for fifty years, as well as the occasional exploratory expedition; but much of this territory was unknown and unmarked save by the tribes who have lived well in it for hundreds of years and who were still present.

On its face the expedition of 1868 may have seemed a separate and self-contained experience, but Powell had a more far-reaching goal in mind, of which the 1868 trek was both scouting mission and prelude. He had discussed it with Indians and mountain men, with traders and Mormons; he had read the few written reports. He knew what **Lt. Joseph Ives**, who in 1857 in exploring the Colorado River from its mouth to the lower part of the Grand Canyon, had said about the vast stretch of the great chasm being "forever unvisited and undisturbed." He took all this and concluded that the Grand Canyon of the Colorado was runnable and knowable, and he determined to do both.

The plan seems to have become solid in his mind even before he had met with Sumner in 1867, although it does not seem to be something he advertised widely when politicking for funds or when promoting the excursion to his fellow expedition members in 1868. Back in Hot Sulphur Springs in August, Powell had met **Sam Bowles** of the Springfield (Mass.) *Republican*, and Bowles had already advised his readers back East, in somewhat glowing terms, of Powell's ultimate purpose.

On November 2, having completed their winter campsite preparations, Powell and nine others of the crew set out for Green River, Wyoming Territory intending on their way to explore parts of the lower White River watershed and the drainage of the Yampa. Even here their journey was anything but straightforward. They had not counted on the Yampa being such a dry and desiccated area, and their water had been used in drowning a sagebrush fire they had accidentally set while preparing dinner one evening early in the trip. As they went further, it became clear that the part of the valley of the Yampa they were in was not at all like the verdant place from where they had recently tramped. Still they persisted and ultimately made their way to Green River where on November 15, all but Powell and O.G. Howland, one of the hunters recruited by Sumner for the 1868 expedition as well as the



Fading to Blue

upcoming assault on the Grand Canyon, were on a train headed east. For them the journey had come to its conclusion.

By late-November Powell and Howland were headed back toward the winter camp site by way of the valley of the Green River, around the eastern edge of the Uintas, to Brown's Hole upstream from the mouth of the Yampa, and across the dry canyon country over which they had recently come into the drainage of the White and back to what is now indicated on maps as Powell Bottoms. For the remainder of the winter Powell would explore the White River watershed between camp and the river's mouth as well as the mesa country overlooking the watersheds of the White, Yampa, and Grand, fixing in his mind as best he could the gash of the Green River across the bare canyons to the south where its rendezvous with the Grand awaited.

A March flood on the White encouraged the group to head west whether they were exactly ready or not. Once out onto the floodplain of the Yampa, Jack Sumner, O.G. Howland, and William Dunn – another of the mountain man/hunter crew – found a promising spot to hold up while Wes and Emma Powell; Billy Hawkins, the cook; and Seneca Howland, the younger Howland brother; and Walt Powell went on to Green River. From there Wes and Emma were headed back east: John Wesley to Chicago to initiate the construction of the boats he had designed for the canyons, and Emma to Detroit and family to wait out her husband's upcoming excursion.

Eventually the Sumner group moved on at a leisurely pace, making their way to Green River to catch up with Walt Powell, Seneca Howland, and Billy Hawkins and anticipate the major's return.

On May 11, 1869, a line of Union Pacific railroad cars came to a stop in the once-booming, but now withering town. Among their discharges were Wes Powell and four newly crafted boats, built to his specifications and created with the idea that they should be capable of carrying everything a crew of ten would need for an anticipated nine month exploration. They were so new that they still needed to be painted and caulked, and otherwise made riverworthy.



Waves of Stone

It is worthwhile to note here that on the day before Wes Powell unloaded his shiny new flotilla a ritual of the stateliest order had taken place just two hundred miles further west in Promontory, Utah. On that occasion the final four, and, as show would have it, two of them golden, spikes were pounded into a rail, thus joining the efforts of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific in the completion of the trans-continental railroad. As the locomotives "Jupiter" and "119" stood opposite, smiling through cow-catcher teeth at each other on that day, the face of the Continental United States was forever and irrevocably altered. Today as traffic zips past, flowing over the course of the asphalt and steel of I-80, it is difficult to feel, much less fathom, the permutations wrought by that simple act; but in 1869 the magnitude of the change was quickly obvious; and while Powell and his gang worked at river level to start their exodus, on the bridge above them the first train ever to connect the ends of the continent, and thus the points in between, passed over and into history.

Around mid-day on May 24, the good citizens of Green River collected on the banks of the stream where the Powell Expedition had been busily preparing themselves. As they watched, the *Emma Dean*, the *Kitty Clyde's Sister*, the *Maid-of-the-Canyon*, and the *No-Name* all pushed away, caught the current, and pointed themselves downstream. The planning, the preparing, the scouting, the waiting were over; the journey had begun. It would be July 17 before anyone would receive any authentic word on the whereabouts and welfare of the travelers, and this in the form of a letter from

O.G. Howland to his previous employer, William Byers' *Rocky Mountain News*. Meanwhile wild rumor would swirl east and west that the entire party had been lost in the rapids of the Green River, or that one of them had lived to tell the tale, the "one" turning out to be various imposters claiming to have been part of the crew. With the same July mail arrived letters from Andy Hall to his brother and from Major Powell to the *Chicago Tribune*.

All of the crew, in fact, were well; perhaps bruised and somewhat battered, but in one piece and not too much the worse for wear. They had made it through the first three big canyons of the Green – Flaming Gorge, Horseshoe Canyon, and Kingfisher Canyon – not devastatingly difficult stretches of rapids – but enough to give the men an opportunity to learn what whitewater boating was all about. Then, on June 8 calamity struck. Below the mouth of the Vermillion River, the Green changed its east-west cant along the axis of the Uintas and cut directly south into the range. The stream became a continuum of boulder-filled water with rapids of varying heights and pitches. In a split-second lapse of reaction timing the *No Name* got away from its crew; and before they could recover, it had slammed into a mid-stream boulder and split apart. A third of their food supply, some of their scientific instruments – barometers in particular, and quite a few personal items – clothing, especially, were lost, though the barometers were later recovered. They would name the spot Disaster Rapid, and this stretch of the river they memorialized as the Canyon of Lodore. At its end, following two more significant mishaps, would be the mouth of the Yampa where some of them had camped on previous scouting missions in 1868. Here beginning on June 22, they could rest and recoup. They were not yet even in unknown territory, but they had discovered that watching a river from above and trying to maneuver within its grip from the level of the water are two entirely different matters.

By June 28, they had reached the mouth of the Uinta River in a broad valley that is the widest break in the canyons on the entire length of the river, the last point of the journey where they would be near to any known human settlements. The Uinta Indian Agency was forty miles west.

Powell sent his brother and Andy Hall ahead to check on mail; and two days later he,



In the Land of the Standing Rock People Hawkins, and Goodman followed after them on a mission to try to replenish some of their lost supplies. On July 5, Powell and three of the crew returned to the river with a resupply of flour. Frank Goodman had decided to remain at the reservation, enough adventure already.

They had sojourned in the Wonsits Valley for several days, with the mouth of the White River less than two miles downstream, which had given the Major a chance to explore territory where they had camped briefly the previous winter; but on July 6, they were off again, this time into a land that was truly terra incognita. By evening the wide valley had closed in, and they found themselves in canyon land once more.

It was two days later that there occurred one of the more memorable and often depicted mishaps of the journey when the Major miscalculated a sequence of steps on a canyon rim and found himself practically dangling by his one arm from a rock projection with almost nothing underneath him but a long drop to the river. Only George Bradley was with him, and neither had carried a rope on their scouting climb. Bradley took off his long underwear and lowered it toward Powell. With catlike timing Powell let go the rock and grabbed the drawers, and Bradley pulled him to safety.

They were on the back slope of a large plateau through which the river had cut directly, now known as East Tavaputs and West Tavaputs. The canyons leading through it they named Desolation and Coal

(now called Gray), both of which were filled with dangerous boulders and treacherous waves that sometimes sliced beneath overhanging rock walls, which were the Roan and Book Cliffs, cut through where they now passed by the on-going erosive forces of the mighty stream.

The run of rapids was so continuous that it began to tug at nerves, and tempers became short; however, not many miles after the mouth of Coal Canyon, nature gave them a welcome reprieve. The open valley they gained was the trace of the old Spanish Trail, where the town of Green River, Utah now stands.

Over several days they pushed south encountering a stretch of slow moving water they named Stillwater Canyon, currently within the boundaries of Canyonlands National Park. Beyond it, the riverbed began to drop across a run of rippling rapids which suddenly gave way on the left to another river of only slightly greater volume than the stream which bore their coasting crafts. It was the Grand, and to turn away from its incoming flow and look to the right downstream was to gaze upon the true birth of the mighty Colorado River. By Powell's measuring they had come 538 miles from beneath the railroad bridge at Green River, Wyoming Territory, some slight bit more than halfway of the journey they had anticipated. They had lost one boat and, with it, an important portion of their supplies; they were tired and their food supplies, such as there remained, were perilously low. Flour had been moldy for some time, bacon spoiled, and dried apples soaked and re-dried over and again. Their clothing was ragged and torn. Many of their scientific instruments were so banged up they were barely serviceable. But they were ready to continue.

While at the junction Powell took several days to measure and record, for before their presence here the maps were merely educated guesses; Powell and his men were creating the substance of geography. On July 19, the pleasant waters into which they first rowed quickly gave way to a turbulence such as they had not experienced. Drop after drop, rapid on rapid required portaging and lining such as they had not previously been forced to conduct. Finally, at a place where a muddy stream entered from the right, the seemingly endless turbulence ended. They named their tormentor

Cataract Canyon and the brown water stream they christened the "Dirty Devil". Below the Dirty Devil the river turned benign, and they rode through a chasm of pleasant water and incredible beauty. They named it Glen Canyon. Its pulchritude came to be so highly regarded that when the federal government in its infinite wisdom chose it, a hundred years on, as the spot on which to build a great dam for lots of rather inane reasons, **Eliot Porter** worked ahead of the rising water to create one of the most beautiful works of photographic art ever produced, the book he called *The Place No One Knew Glen Canyon on the Colorado*. If folks had listened to John Wesley Powell a hundred years

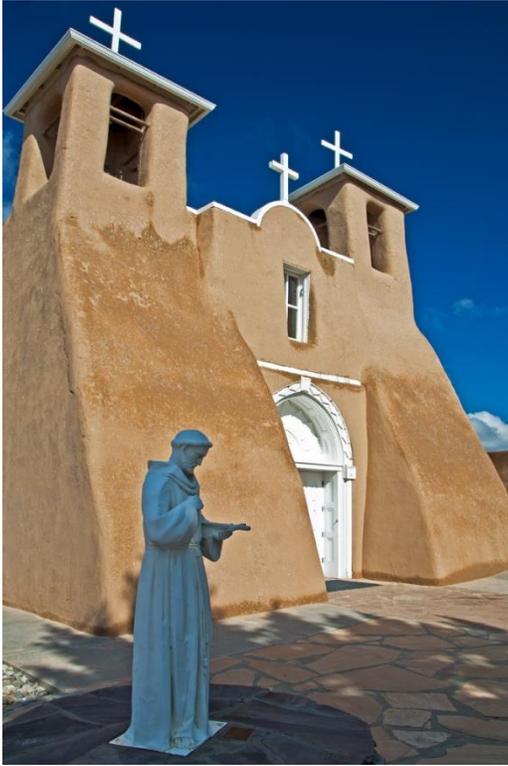


If the Gods Had a Valley

sooner, Eliot might have decided that a different title would be more suited to his wonderful imagery; but that's a tale ahead of itself.

The idyllic run of Glen Canyon, at the time the Powell survey passed through, was 149 miles; and they knew somehow it could not last, but they had geography on their minds. Somewhere, they knew, the San Juan had to enter the Colorado. Mormon cartography had it fifty miles below the great junction, but the maps from Washington put it at one hundred. In fact, it was further west than that. So intent were they in searching the east bank that they entirely missed the mouth of the Escalante coming in from the west. On July 31, as they approached a hulking wall ahead of them, which turned the Colorado in a sharp right about, the San Juan appeared, flowing as stoutly as the White. With the

joinder of the San Juan, the entire upper watershed of the river, from Wyoming to southwestern Colorado, carried them along. Whatever it had been before, the Colorado was now full grown. The August heat hung unrelenting, and though Powell seemed focused only on the measurements, their supplies were beginning to run dangerously low; spoilage was also taking its toll. Collectively the crew let it be known that they were adamant about moving on, and so the Major acquiesced. Toward the lower end of Glen Canyon they passed the mouth of Padre Creek where in 1776 Silvestre Escalante



and his fellow friar, Francisco Dominguez crossed the Colorado on their return to Santa Fe, having failed to achieve their goal of finding a route through to the missions in California. Pressing on they emerged from the canyon on August 4, where a line of incredibly beautiful cliffs crossed the river from the west and continued southward. Here the Paria River, at a location familiar to Mormon explorers, Jacob Hamblin in particular, entered from the north. At the Paria, they camped and made quick measurements before pushing on into a river now bound by a different kind of rock from the Navajo Sandstone behind them. It was hard limestone; it was exquisitely beautiful; and its riverbed was boulder-filled and treacherous. Each side canyon was a flash-flood wash of monstrous rocks that had spilled out into the main channel to create boat-killing rapids. Powell named its sixty-five miles of lithic beauty Marble Canyon. It is a place where water levels can swing a hundred vertical feet between passing storm surges.

Marble Canyon was not particularly kind to the boatmen or their boats. The heat was insufferable, their food becoming less edible almost by the hour, the cataracts ominous and relentless. At a point where the river arced eastward they came to a wall that seemed to sparkle as a tiara set with

In Giving of Ourselves...

diamonds. The diamonds turned out to be springs gushing from the cliff creating rainbows of refracted light, and below them a verdant lushness spread about, which they named for their companion from the previous summer, **(George)Vasey's** Paradise. Marble Canyon was behind them and as the gorge walls grew, they reached another known but uncharted site – the mouth of the Little Colorado, draining southeast to northwest across the lower expanse of the greater plateau.

The Colorado Chiquito did not seem to impress them, perhaps because of the fatigue that was beginning to enfold them all; but they stayed for two days, weary and hungry, so that the Major could take measurements and the boats could be given absolutely needed repairs.

For now, what they knew to be so was that they were entering the big chasm, the biggest of the big canyons, the Grandfather. One benefit of their situation was that the boats, being lighter, would be more maneuverable; linings and portages would also be easier. And in assessing their plight, Powell wrote, "...but we have a large sack of coffee." As they entered the Grand Canyon they seem to have been quite aware that somehow proportionally they were even smaller than they had previously been and the walls around them were substantially larger and more inclined to be made of granite, which was exponentially harder and more rugged than the sandstone back upstream. The character of the river was also changed; the channel narrower, the waters deeper. The weather did not befriend them, and there were days of 115° temperatures followed by nights of rain, so that they were perpetually in a steamy dampness. Camping was made difficult because in most places there was little shore and little wood with which to cook food. It was necessary, time and time again, to run rapids they might have otherwise chosen to avoid simply because they had no choice; the river would not allow otherwise.

Their status as a survey for science became questionable: all of their barometers were non-functional and O.G. Howland's map that had been created from the Little Colorado down was lost on an occasion

when he was forced to swim in a violent rapid.

This went on for nearly two hundred miles, so that all that seemed to be on their minds was the prayed for break in the canyon that would hail the Grand Wash Cliffs and, shortly thereafter, the mouth of the Virgin River and the end of what appeared to be more nightmare than daydream. And thus it came to be that on the evening of August 27, after such dinner as they could put together had been eaten, Powell was approached by the elder Howland with the decision that three of the crew had reached: they were not willing to continue. After some discussion, they did agree to postpone saying anything to the others until Powell had a chance to try to plot their exact position. Once he had fairly convinced himself of the likely degree of his accuracy – that they were no more than eighty to ninety river miles from the Virgin – he informed Howland, whose mind remained unchanged. Later in the evening the Major awakened the remaining members; and each, to a man, chose to stay with him for the duration, whenever it might be.

The next morning after a somber breakfast Powell gave the two Howlands and Bill Dunn two rifles and a shotgun, and a share of the remaining food. They graciously declined the food. The entire crew then conducted a portage of the two larger boats, the decision having been made to leave the leaking Emma Dean where she lay since there were now insufficient hands to manage all three.

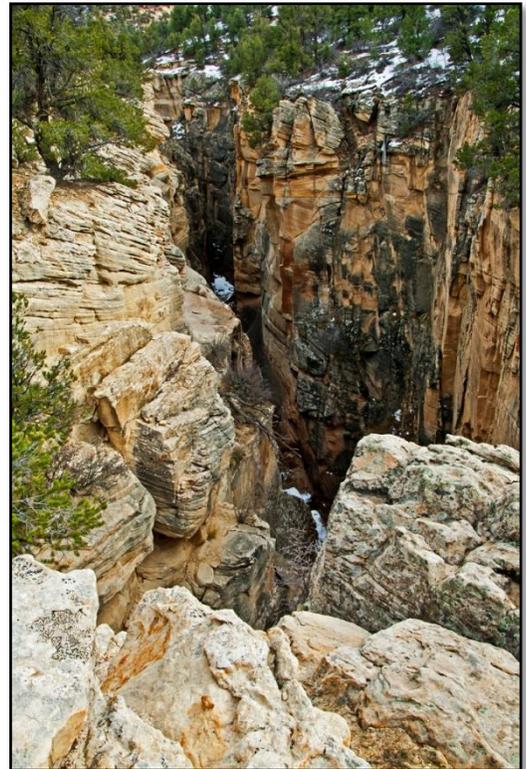
From a position up the slope of the cliff on the north side of the river the three watched as the *Maid of the Canyon* and then the *Kitty Clyde's Sister* caught the current – were seized by its more accurate – and began a blurring dash through Separation Rapids.

Below the mine field of jutting rocks and rollercoaster waves the two boats, battered but not torn, found an eddy and their crews bailed their overburdened hulls. After firing rifle shots to indicate that they were safe, they waited for a while to see if the three castaways would come; and when no one showed, they continued on.

Six-and-a half miles below Separation waited the monster. Since every bad rapid had been, to Bradley, worse than the bad one before it, it's hard to get a clear sense of worst. But by the accounts we have, Lava Cliff may well have won the title. It certainly was the one that received his greatest attention; but because it has caused its terror from beneath the waters of Lake Mead since the rising riffles covered not only it, but the rest of the river past the mouth of the Virgin and down to Hoover Dam in 1938, we will likely never know for certain.

To Powell's remaining boatmen, however, it may truly have been the worst of the worst. Bradley's journal seems to say so, anyway. "This ride," he says, "stands A No. 1 of the trip." Below Lava Cliff the terror ended, and on August 30, just beyond a stop they had made near mid-day to speak with a family of Paiutes, they came upon four men retrieving a seine from the river. When approached, the men – a Mormon, his two sons, and an Indian – told Powell they were performing their task under directions from Church headquarters in Salt Lake City. They were looking, they said, for the remains – human or material – from the wreckage of the Powell Expedition, which had been reported lost many weeks ago. Perhaps in that moment John Wesley could have anticipated a future line from his great literary contemporary, **Mark Twain**, and declared, "The report of my death was an exaggeration."

Indeed, it was. What was not exaggerated was the public reaction to the exploits of the Powell Expedition. As slowly and as erratically as the news could travel, even with the advent of the ubiquitous telegraph lines and railroads that spanned the continent, the outcome of Powell's journey



Take a Bull Valley by the Horns

Take a Bull Valley by the Horns

spread before him. His trip back east was tempered by his learning the fate of the Howlands and Dunn; but in Illinois and afterward in Washington, he was hailed a national hero. He had made known to an uninformed public the last unknown area of the country.

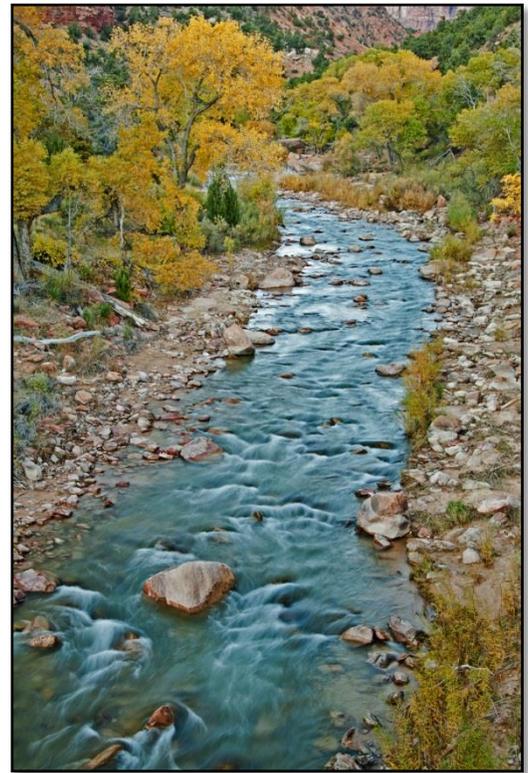
The Congress, which on two previous occasions he had practically begged for funds and sponsorship without success other than the grant of a pittance allocation for rations, was soon to allot \$10,000 for his continued explorations, geographical and topographical, of the Colorado Plateau, the river, and the region; thereby giving to his effort official recognition as one of the great and on-going federal western surveys, on a par with the others already established by King, Hayden, and Wheeler. This allocation would allow him over the next ten years to justify the adventure which had given rise to his new status; but the journey for which the allotment had been the reward was only a step in a greater journey still; and this was the journey of knowledge. From knowledge came new science, and from new science, new knowledge; for this was, as John Wesley Powell saw it, the great adventure of mankind, the ever-forward progression of understanding that would lead to the ultimate expression of human happiness and well-being. John Wesley Powell had irrevocably committed himself to this journey and to the role of government scientist, which would allow him to carry the journey forward as far as he possibly could.

Other than the evolving philosophical make-up of John Wesley Powell in the years following his first expedition on the Colorado River, which philosophy was an outgrowth of both the experiences and values he had integrated as a younger man and his on-going, never-ending, and intense quest for knowledge and meaning as he grew older, there are two points of awareness which seem crucial to a complete comprehension of the man within the context of his times.

The first of these was the push toward centralization that took place in the political institutions of the United States in the decades following the Civil War. The kernel of this consolidation of power and influence in Washington, D.C. had been germinated, of course, during the war itself, but in the years afterward it blossomed full-grown, and this was true especially of the functions of science. In his seminal and far-thinking biography of Powell entitled *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian: John Wesley Powell and the Second Opening of the West*, **Wallace Stegner** says that, "Less than twenty years after the war, Washington was one of the great scientific centers of the world."

Institutions such as the National Weather Bureau, the National Park Service, the Coast and Geodetic Survey, the Bureau of Standards, the Geological Survey, and others, were all birthed or reconfigured during this time to carry out the needs of the country for scientific knowledge and enlightenment, particularly in the face of the expansionist political philosophies and ideas that came to be prevalent. If you wanted to do science after the Civil War, Washington was the place to start. The period after the war was also the re-opening, or second opening, if you will, of the American West, and it was this westward push, and society's thoughts on how it should take place and what was its purpose that were the second point of awareness in understanding John Wesley Powell's life in the wake of the first expedition. For Wes Powell, government science was two things: it was, itself, the information that would make possible the development of the land west of the hundredth meridian and it was the repository of that learning which would then be used to guide the intelligent unfolding of that development.

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Down the Virgin to the Colorado

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streamed through the gaps and struggled over the ridges of the Appalachian Mountains in the 1790s; but it took a number of years, a rationale, and the evolutionary outcome of a national civil conflict for the stars to be properly aligned.

In 1839, there appeared in the *American Democratic Review*, Volume 6, Issue 23 an article by the highly regarded journalist and advocate of Jacksonian Democracy, **John L. Sullivan**, entitled “*The Great Nation of Futurity*”. And, while it did not contain the specific words, it well described the principles of an idea known as Manifest Destiny. In that article Sullivan articulated that “...our national birth was the beginning of a new history...which separates us from the past and connects us with the future only; and so far as regards the entire development of the natural rights of man, in moral, political, and national life, we may confidently assume that our country is destined to be the great nation of futurity.” It would be six years later, in 1845, that Sullivan would use the exact words, “manifest destiny”, in an article in the same publication urging the annexation of Texas, “...our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions...”

The national angst over the issue of slavery would slow the clear development of Manifest Destiny, perhaps ensuring that it never became a well-formed policy, rather a set of closely related ideas, but there were many, including Presidents of the stripe of **Andrew Jackson** and **U.S. Grant**, who

believed and acted as if “Providence – God’s intervention in the world – had given the United States a mission to spread republican democracy.” And the end of the Civil War gave renewal to the push to apply those principles to the development of the West.

In 1872, the artist **John Gast** created one of the more memorable artistic expressions of manifest destiny entitled *American Progress*. The publicist **George Croffut**’s marketing piece for the lithograph began this way, “This rich and wonderful country – the progress of which at the present time is the wonder of the old world – was, until recently, inhabited exclusively by the lurking savage and wild beasts of prey. If



Ode to a Roaming Buffalo

the rapid progress of the “Great West” has surprised our people, what will those of other countries think of the “Far West,” which was destined at an early day to be the vast granary, as it is now the treasure chamber of our country?”

John Wesley Powell’s notion of development and his ideas about the application of scientific principles to understanding the lands of the Colorado Plateau did not conform to this way of thinking. To be sure, he believed in the development of the western lands, but in an age when emotionalism and nationalistic fervor often held sway, he operated by common sense, believed in facts, and proceeded through system. As a government scientist, he believed that government should undertake science and scientific research for the human good. Knowledge might be an abstraction, but it should also be practical; and its immediate end was policy implemented by legislation. Ultimately its objective was the improvement of man’s condition and of man himself.

There is an honored military axiom which states that when conditions on the ground do not conform to conditions on the map, the appropriate action is to disregard the map. Powell had seen the ground; he had been there and he would go again; and his trusted assistants would go again and again. So that by the time their surveys were complete to their satisfaction the map of the Colorado Plateau region would conform as nearly as possible to every condition the ground had revealed.

This intimate familiarity would allow Powell, even before his second expedition had left the field, to

formulate a descriptive division of the intermountain West into three physiographic regions, which he labeled the Park Province, the Plateau Province, and the Great Basin Province. The Plateau Province, which includes all of eastern and southern Utah, a portion of western Colorado, and part of northern New Mexico and Arizona, is the one that is directly relevant to the Colorado Plateau and its great watersheds.

While the purveyors of Manifest Destiny, men such as Colorado's first Territorial Governor, William Gilpin, were proclaiming to everyone who might listen or read, and be influenced thereby, the mostly erroneous gospel that the Colorado Plateau was the next incarnation of the Garden of Eden, in the literal sense of being a garden, the Powell Survey went thoughtfully about observing and measuring the reality of the ground. And what their measurements would ultimately reveal would show a truth and a land at great odds with this emotionally charged portrait, and create a vision of development and usage often at cross-purposes with itself even to this day.

I find the life of John Wesley Powell so fascinating and instructive that, in all the years of writing this newsletter, I am going to do something here I have never done before. I am going to save the second half of this story for the next issue of *A Song for the Asking*. I have taken you through only his thirty-eighth year, and he has just begun to undertake many of the activities for which he is so justly remembered. His trip down the Colorado was an adventure of the highest order; but it was merely an adventure and only a small part of the man. As any good river runner will tell you, as real as the water and the rocks truly are, the river is mostly a metaphor.

Next Issue: John Wesley Powell, The Government Science Years.

What's Now?:

Shaconage: Through a Glass and...

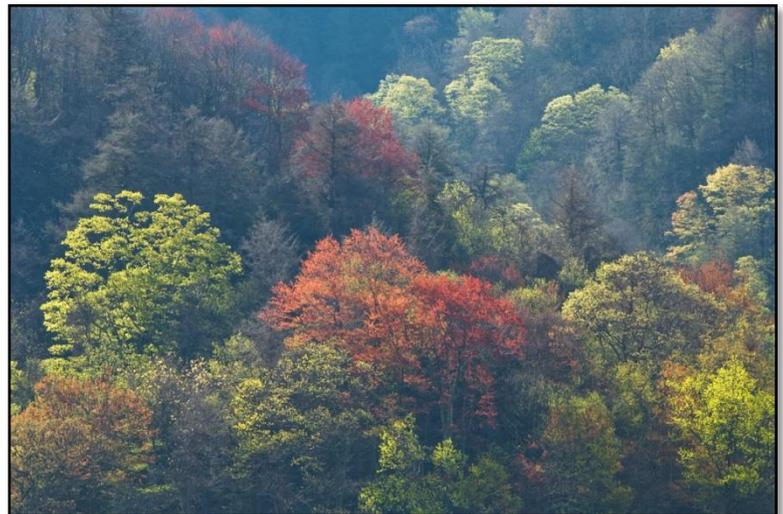
After I had climbed Mt. LeConte more than fifty times – later increased to more than eighty times – my wife asked why I went to LeConte so often. I told her that I was pretty certain that I had seen or learned something new on each and every trip.

Carlos Campbell
from *Memories of Old Smoky*

Yesterday was a day for rituals, not entirely unlike, I suppose, a ritual of the sort that **Carlos Campbell** would have appreciated.

Carlos Campbell was a Sevier County, Tennessee native who grew up in Knoxville and became one of the best friends Great Smoky Mountains National Park ever had. His vocation as a journalist and manager of the Knoxville Chamber of Commerce pales in contrast to his avocation as a lover of the Smokies and promoter of the Park. He was one of those whose influence was directed long and hard toward the creation of the Park; and once it was established he was a major force in advancing its interests.

For me, he will always be a special person. The first wildflower book I ever owned, *Great Smoky Mountains Wildflowers*, was



Looking Over Carlos Campbell

co-authored by Carlos Campbell. In its fifth and expanded edition, and edited by **Bob Hutson**, the son of co-author, **Dr. William Hutson**, it is an indispensable field guide to identifying many of the more common and not-so-common species that make this place the most amazing “Wildflower National Park” anywhere. With the passing of his father, Bob Hutson is now the sole editor. I cannot imagine going in the field during flower season without my copy of this helpful compilation. In 2005, Campbell’s granddaughter, **Rebecca Campbell Arrants**, edited many of his writings into a wonderfully interesting volume, *Memories of Old Smoky*, a must-read for anyone who loves these ancient mountains.

Oh yeah, my ritual: during the last 3-4 days of February every year for the past decade I have gone to a place in the Park that is not only dear to me; it is prescient as well. It is one of the best wildflower locations to be found, especially for the abundance of its early-blooming species. It is full of the tiny, delicate sharp-lobed hepatica (*Hepatica acutiloba*), one of the earliest bloomers of all. What the hepatica are doing during these last days of February has always been a fairly accurate indicator of how the spring season will unfold: early, late or in-between.

Yesterday there were a great many of the wee plant already in full bloom and many others with buds in various stages of being open. This coincides very closely with what I found in the same location last February 26, and I think everyone can remember what wildflower season was like last year. As if this were not enough, yesterday my daughter sent me an image of the azaleas blooming in her yard in Charleston – just about in peak boom. The limb I’m going out on looks fairly sturdy from where I sit:



Adrenal Flower Forecaster

an early spring by three to four weeks. In the next two weeks we will likely see bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), trailing arbutus (*Epigaea repens*), perhaps some spring beauty (*Claytonia virginica*), and some of the early violets (*Viola*). Between mid-March and early-April there will be white fringed phacelia (*Phacelia fimbriata*), large-flowered trillium (*trillium grandiflorum*), a pair of the dicentra species: Dutchman’s breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*) and squirrel corn (*Dicentra canadensis*), trout lily (*Erythronium americanum*), columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*) in the lower stretches of Little River Gorge, bishop’s cap (*Mitella diphylla*), and



Hepatica Riot

several others that are more commonly anticipated in early-to-mid-April. If you enjoy photographing early spring wildflowers, you should make plans to be in the Park by mid-March, or you might miss some of the more spectacular representatives of the initial show.

The winter of 2013 has seen a much higher level of precipitation than the same period of 2012. In consequence, the streams are carrying a fairly full load of run-off and there is whitewater everywhere. Unless the next 2-3 weeks are bone dry the streambeds will likely be running fairly high going into

April. One benefit of this is that the moss on river and creek rocks is healthy and green and will add some very nice color to early spring stream images. Beginning in March, the Middle Prong of Little River in Tremont will be a good place for this, as will Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail. Last year there was concern lest a late-winter or early-spring storm do severe damage to the growing vascular species. Fortunately, it did not happen; but the same concern will be present as we go forward into March this year.

One concern that is already all-too-real is the continued closure of Newfound Gap Road on the North Carolina side of the Park from Newfound Gap to Collins Creek Picnic Area. The projected date for re-opening US 441 on the North Carolina side is May 15th; however the contractor has some liberal monetary incentives in place to encourage re-opening before that date. The road into Greenbrier is closed beyond the ranger station, and the Cataloochee entrance road is closed at Cove Creek Gap. Old NC 284, Mount Sterling Gap Road, is also temporarily closed. For information on all temporary and seasonal closures and re-openings call (865) 436-1200, Option 2, Option 2.

The continued closure of Newfound Gap Road will impact sunrise opportunities going into March. Under normal conditions, March and April would be good months to consider a sunrise shoot from Luftee Overlook; however, with no access to Luftee other than a two-mile round trip walk from Newfound Gap to the overlook, it will make for a challenge to get that early light. On April 1st, Clingman’s Dome Road will re-open for the season, so sunrise from the Dome will be a more enticing choice until mid-May. March and April can be good months to try the Miller Cove Overlook on Foothills Parkway West as an alternative sunrise location.

For sunset, Morton Overlook becomes a solid opportunity beginning about the first of April when the sun has reappeared from behind the long ridge of Sugarland Mountain. Of course, it can always be attractive for late-afternoon work and any time there’s interesting weather in the upper drainage of West Prong of Little Pigeon, which is to say Walker Camp Prong.

Sunrise-Sunset Times

	March 1	March 21	April 1	May 1	May 31
Sunrise:	7:04 a.m.	7:37 a.m.	7:21 a.m.	6:42 a.m.	6:20 a.m.
Sunset:	6:29 p.m.	7:46 p.m.	7:55 p.m.	8:20 p.m.	8:44 p.m.

Daylight Savings Time begins on March 10th

Early spring is a wonderful time to photograph historic structures in the Smokies. The cabins, churches, barns, and sheds of Cades Cove, Cable Mill and Mingus Mill, the structures of Cataloochee, and the historic gems of Roaring Fork: all of these pieces of a shining past seem to perk up and come alive in spring as if to declare that another winter has been successfully endured.

If you are in a position to take advantage of the opportunity during the coming week, now is a great time to photograph the daffodils growing in many of the old cabin sites in Cades Cove. Like their wilder cousins, these Narcissi respond to the weather and they have opened earlier than usual for the same reasons. They are a quaint reminder of the efforts of the



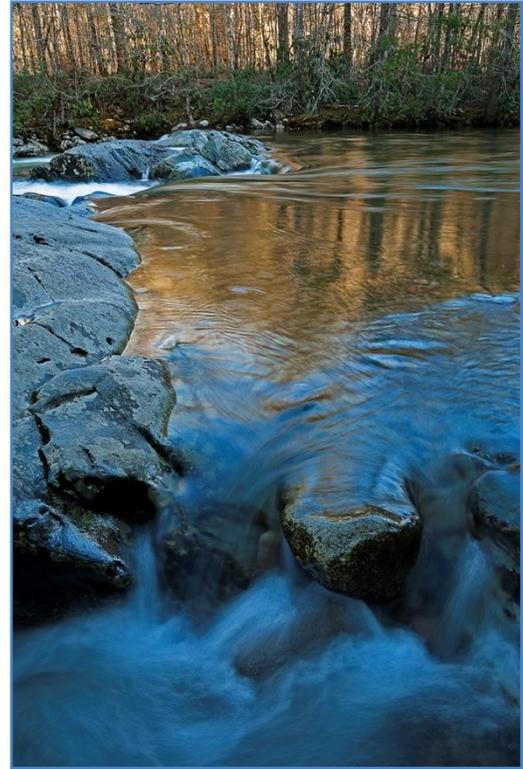
Bud Ogle’s Barn

early mountain settlers to bring beauty into their lives and they can make excellent supporting elements for the gnarled wooden components of an old house or barn. Perhaps the best place to work with this idea is the Pioneer Farmstead at Oconaluftee Visitor Center. While you are there you just might meet up with one of those pesky elks that have broken away from the Cataloochee herd and moved over the mountain.

With all of the indicators of climate change with which we have had to contend over the past several years, forecasting the arrival of spring in these Mountains of Blue Mist has become a game of looking through a glass and darkly. It would be premature to say that these recent patterns will hold or that they are even patterns; and so the watchword seems to be to pay attention in the moment, so that the best judgment can be made as to where to be and when to be there.

We live in a world of such incredible beauty, but its conditions seem to be in a state of change as we go forward into a time such as no one I know has ever seen. Mother Nature is going to need a lot of help, and sharing her beauty with others, with everyone, is as worthwhile a way as any to do good work.

When people see beauty it is innate to respond. As artists who love the natural world, we are in a unique position to show the wonders at our doorstep, whether that doorstep is the coast of Maine, the Grand Canyon, or the Smoky Mountains; and these mountains are, indeed, full of wonder.



A Diversionary Tactic

A Tip is Worth...?

To Heresy or Not to Heresy

I am not interested in shooting new things – I am interested to see new things.

Ernst Haas

In many respects, visual communication can be looked at as a set of problems that can be solved in many different ways. What you want to do when viewing art is discern the problems that other artists have faced and how they solved them.

Bert Krages

from *Photography – The Art of Composition*

The critical viewing of any artistic photographic endeavor, whether standing before a framed print in a gallery, or viewing a projected image on a screen in a critique session, is, as I see it, an essential part of growth as we go forward on this journey of creativity. Constructive assessment of any photographer's work and constructive feedback for our own efforts is something nearly all of us appreciate and from which most of us benefit a great deal.

How we "see" our own images and the images of others tells us a lot about our own creative process; for seeing is the most elemental photographic skill. Whether we "see" will determine, in the first instance, if we even act to make an image; and what we see will determine how we decide to arrange the elements in our visual field: what we include, what we exclude, where we "stand", and what

relationships and values we elect to express. Thus there is this intrinsic connection, as I believe, between the notions of photographic seeing and the concepts of composition: **seeing** is the realization that the visual field contains something of sufficient interest that it is worthy of our effort; and **composition** is the process of arranging that “something,” or, perhaps more commonly, those “somethings” in a pleasing, or at least effective, way of communicating the somethings to others. But I also believe it goes one step further; I would add “when viewed as a whole” as an essential ingredient of understanding compositional communication.

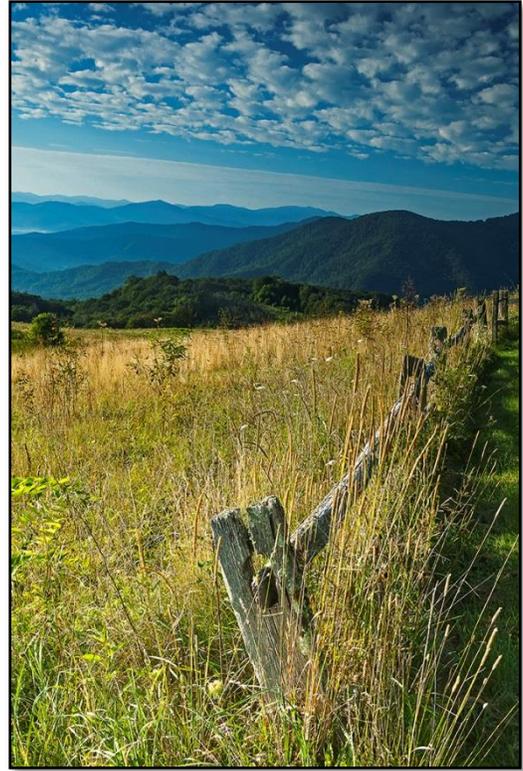
Let’s consider one of the often cited contrasts between the mechanics of the photographic process on the one hand and the mechanics, if you will, of the creative process on the other. We say that the photographic process – the manipulation of aperture, shutter speed, light management, and the like – are left-brain functions because they involve the rational and logical part of what we do. On the other hand we say that the creative process is a right-brain function because it involves the feeling, intuitive part of the equation. And we say that both functions are requisite parts of the journey every good photographer undertakes. If I have vision, but no technique, I am as unlikely to be an effective communicator as if I were the most competent technician on the planet, but lacked the heart to evoke feeling in my work. And so it goes.

Let’s compress our thoughts to only the artistic, creative aspect of the process for a moment and consider that the left-brain ~ right-brain analogy can also be applied specifically to considerations of how we “see,” and, therefore, ultimately to how we compose images.

Most of us were taught, and I am guilty, myself, sometimes of teaching that effective composition involves learning how to see in terms of the notions of graphic design, as if the mind goes directly from non-awareness to an analysis of the discrete elements within the visual field, and immediately begins to make determinations and reach conclusions based on that analysis; and that, from this, a composition – an elemental arrangement – is derived. I want to say here that in approaching the learning of composition in this way, there is a real chance that we deprive ourselves of a full appreciation of photography as an art form. This is not to say that we should not make that analysis, but rather that in going directly to it, there might be a step we miss which would allow us to see images in a more complete and meaningful way.

Neuropsychology has demonstrated that rather than being a camera sending pictures to the brain, the eye-brain relationship takes place on several levels simultaneously; but, most importantly, that much more often than not the eye-brain function simply ignores most of the information gathered by the eye. This limitation to conscious perception is, for the most part, a good thing, because if it did not occur, our brains would become overloaded with information. The down side of this filtering process is that it is a suppressant to visual perception and an impediment to visual literacy. What we do not perceive, we cannot photograph; nor can we notice it as detail within a visual field in which we might photograph. Sometimes it can also go as far as failing to include elements that were perceived and intended to be part of an image.

Betty Edwards, in her seminal work, *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, now in an updated edition entitled *The New Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, revealed that the left-brain function is responsible for analytic thought and symbol processing while the right-brain operation deals with



In De-Fence of Wholeness

spatial cognition and intuitive functioning. In teaching her students drawing, Professor Edwards utilized exercises that were designed to impart five skills: perception of edges, perception of spaces, perception of relationships, perception of lights and shadows, and perception of the whole. Notice how these perceptions correlate to the “Principles of Design” that I have mentioned in other places. Each is an important part of effective photographic communication.

In his insightful tome, *Photography – The Art of Composition*, **Bert Krages** mentions several interesting awareness shifts that commonly occur when we undertake the switch from the analytic, left-brain way of seeing to the more cognitive, right-brain approach: Our understanding comes to be dominated by an awareness that is non-verbal and sometimes difficult to articulate. There is a comprehension of things seen, but an inability to describe them in words. The awareness of time becomes diminished. Sometimes this shift produces feelings of unease, agitation, or anxiety, which is apparently the classic way in which that left-brain perception reacts to situations to which it is ill-equipped to respond. The reward for this effort, as Krages puts it, is ultimately the ability to switch between left- and right-brain functioning at will, and the outgrowth is a better understanding of, and

more effective approach to, composition, which makes the visual communication of our images easier to comprehend.

And this brings me to the point with which I began. I believe that any image should be judged by how well it accomplishes its task of communicating its subject in an interesting, powerful, and competent way, over and above whether its elements conform to some pre-ordained set of rules.

Again, research by neuroscientists and psychologists is instructive; and the most meaningful contributions to the study of the perception of images has come from Gestalt theory. Of primary note here is that Gestalt theory postulates that the



Pictoshadow or Petrashade

mind experiences the image as an entirety and whole, without first analyzing the parts. The wholeness is seen before the component pieces.

We should be clear that Gestalt theory does not address the issues of how to compose an image; rather it speaks to how a photographer’s choices in composing the image might affect the way in which viewers perceive and respond to it. For example, it is commonly said that a photographer should avoid superimpositions, such as the classic background lamppost growing out of a foreground subject’s head. According to Gestalt theory nearly everyone can distinguish a figure from its background and are not confused by superimpositions; but what can be problematic is the situation where it is difficult to distinguish between the edges of a figure and its background.

There is any number of compositional guidelines; and in many, if not most, instances they can be very useful. However, as Bert Krages asserts, “placing too much emphasis on guidelines can limit the ability to perceive a scene by shifting the cognitive processing away from perception to analytical processing.”

When we look at images made by other photographers, as well as our own – in a gallery, on a screen, whatever – we are giving ourselves an opportunity to grow photographically. And, especially with regard to other photographers, we are allowing ourselves an opportunity to mine for insights into how they went about solving the problems they faced in their creative process, which we may well have faced, and perhaps continue to face, in our own. This can be especially true if, in the first instance, we suspend all critical judgment and seek to access our intuitive feelings about the image. Does it work well to fulfill its purpose? Why do you like it, or dislike it? Is the subject matter appealing? Does it

work from a technical point of view, as for example with respect to sharpness and shadow detail? These are all intuitive considerations that occur with respect to the whole of the image without regard to its adherence to a set of compositional “Do’s and Don’ts.” Why not let these questions and others they raise be with us ab initio, from the beginning? Their answers require almost no analysis whatsoever, but rather recognition of the way the image makes us feel. Once we have done this, then we can begin to deconstruct what we are seeing into as many components as we can; we can analyze and evaluate from every point of view we can imagine. But first, let’s just be silent. As **William Hurt**’s character in *The Big Chill* forcefully suggested, “Sometimes you just have to let art flow over you.”

As for EarthSong/Walking in Beauty...

Walking in Beauty

As I walk with Beauty
As I walk, as I walk
The universe is walking with me
In beauty it walks before me
In beauty it walks behind me
In beauty it walks below me
In beauty it walks above
Beauty is on every side
As I walk, I walk with beauty

Traditional Diné Prayer

While we have the gift of life, it seems to me the only tragedy is to allow part of us to die – whether it is our spirit, our creativity, or our glorious uniqueness.

Gilda Radner

Winter in the Southern Appalachians is always a wonderful time in its own right, for the land may be dormant; but it is still very much alive, and you can feel its vibration and pulse wherever you go. But winter is also a great time for reflection, for planning, and for preparing for the weeks and months ahead. It has been a productive winter, and now it’s almost time to go forward into the warming days of spring, the changing light, and the beauty of regeneration and rebirth. The beginning of workshop season is just around the corner, and Bonnie and I are really excited about the year ahead. Before EarthSong’s workshops begin I have a couple of teaching engagements that I want to mention. Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts in Gatlinburg, Tennessee and the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, North Carolina are two of the premier arts and crafts schools in the South, if not the nation, and I honored to be asked to teach the great students who always



Rise and Shine Hay Bales

participate in their programs.

April 11-14: Arrowmont School of Arts & Crafts, Gatlinburg, Tennessee

The Heart and Craft of Digital Nature Photography: A Comprehensive Mini-Workshop
This long weekend workshop will be an excellent chance to get warmed up for your spring adventures. We'll explore the craft of digital nature photography in the classroom, but we'll spend more of our time in the wonders of Great Smoky Mountains National Park exploring creativity in the field and creating images to process for our thoughtful critique sessions. For more information contact info@arrowmont.org, or call (865) 436-5860. Visit the website at www.arrowmont.org.

April 14-20: John C. Campbell Folk School, Brasstown, North Carolina

Digital in Depth: The Heart of Digital Nature Photography

When I leave Arrowmont, I'll go directly to Brasstown to celebrate Earth Week at the Folk School. We'll spend a week immersed in classroom programs, lots of work in the field in the Nantahala National Forest and Cherohala Skyway, and on the beautiful campus of JCCFS. Our adventures will give us plenty of material from which to create the critique sessions that are the stuff of photographic growth. For more information contact the Folk School by clicking on the email contact button on the website, www.folkschool.org, or call (800) FOLK SCH (365-5724).

The longer I spend teaching what I so dearly love, the more I feel compelled to reduce the size of the group with which I work at any given time. So this year the maximum number of participants in an EarthSong Workshop will be eight (8). I am convinced that a smaller group makes for a better workshop experience. I recently sent out a notice about the lodging situation for the Cape Cod Workshop in September and several of you have responded. Thanks for your cooperation.

June 8-14: Acadia National Park/Mount Desert Island, Maine: **Spring in Acadia Southwest Harbor/Seawall Motel: (800) 248-9250**

Acadia is a special place to us, which is why we do two workshops there every year. The Seawall Motel is like our home away from home; and Dave, Vickie, Adam, and Morgan are like family.

In the fifteen years I have been photographing in Acadia I have learned its rhythms and its times. It is like a great friend that shares itself slowly and thoughtfully.

From Bass Harbor to Schoodic Point, from Great Head to Long Pond, and from Beech Cliff to Little Hunter's Beach; it is a

land of magnificent water, amazing rock, and glorious light that will feed your soul. Contact don@earthSongphotography.com; or (828) 788-0687.



September 21-27: Cape Cod National Seashore, Massachusetts: **The Cusp of Autumn
Truro/The Blue Seas Motor Inn: (888) 768-7666**

Cape Cod is like the delicately crooked finger of a giant beckoning hand and where it asks you to come is somewhere you definitely wish to go. Where the mighty Atlantic meets the nurturing waters of Cape Cod Bay, it is a land of contrasts, a gift to the sea of glacial deposition. Its timeless tides are a whisper of the beauty that is found where land and sea come together in a riotous explosion of life and light. Cape Cod is a history and a story of the earliest presence of the European settlement of the New World. It is a photographer's dream.



October 5-11: Acadia National Park/Mount Desert Island, Maine: **The Colors of Acadia
Southwest Harbor/Seawall Motel: (800) 248-9250**

Acadia in the fall is a photographic experience like none other. From the incredible hardwoods to the ever-present blueberries, that are often more like carpet than ground cover, Mount Desert Island comes alive with rainbows of color and with light that is the tonality of liquid gold. From the seashores to the ponds and lakes, to the streams and marshes, to the forests and cliffs Acadia puts on a display of autumn finery that will leave you breathless and believing you are in the midst of nature's own fireworks display. Contact don@earthsongphotography.com



October 19-25: The Beauty of the Coast, Narragansett, Rhode Island: **An Autumn Reverie
Narragansett/The Anchor Motel: (401) 792-8550**

Our last workshop of the season is certainly by no means the least. The rocky Rhode Island Coast is truly a unique place where freshwater ponds (They will tell you they have no lakes) teeming with waterfowl and wildlife are separated from the Atlantic Ocean by spits of land you can throw a rock across. There is a subtle color that is startling and a coastline that hides secret cliffs as well as sandy beaches, often side by side. There is a history of resistance here that reveals itself in the austerity of public architecture and private farms. And there are lighthouses that tell of man's on-going relationship to the sea. It is place where you can lose yourself and not wish to be found. Contact don@earthsongphotography.com.



We hope you'll plan to join us on a photography adventure that will inspire you, challenge you, and remain with you always.

Until next time, may the Spirit of Light guide your shutter release.

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Sunrise, Southwest Harbor, Maine