

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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"There's No Place Like Home."
Judy Garland (Dorothy)
The Wizard of Oz

Homeward Bound

"Whole nations have melted away in our presence like balls of snow before the sun, and have scarcely left their names behind, except as imperfectly recorded by their enemies and destroyers. It was once hoped that your people would not be willing to travel beyond the mountains, so far from the ocean, on which your commerce was carried on, and your connections maintained with the nations of Europe. But now that fallacious hope has vanished; you have passed the mountains and settled upon Tsalagi lands and wish to have your usurpations sanctioned by the confirmation of a treaty. When that should be obtained, the same encroaching spirit will lead you upon other lands of the Tsalagis.



Smoke on Rice Knob

New cessions will be applied for, and finally the country which the Tsalagis and our forefathers have so long occupied will be called for; and a small remnant of this nation once so great and formidable will be compelled to seek a retreat in some far distant wilderness...."

With these words, on March 15, 1775, at the negotiations that became the Treaty of Sycamore Shoals, **Tsi'yu Gunsini**, quite arguably the greatest Tsalagi war leader of all time, known to history as **Dragging Canoe**, at the time still a young and unknown warrior, rose to address the

assembled council on the second day. There was emotion in his voice for he could already see the direction the talks were taking, and it did not bode well for his point of view.

Even though the Americans had not yet formally even begun their struggle for independence from Britain, they had arrived boldly and surreptitiously on the doorstep of these ancient mountain dwellers, and were demanding to be allowed to own what they had found; and there on the banks of the Watauga River, flowing briskly through Tennessee's (then still North Carolina's) Unakas foothills, the Principal People took a major step in the fulfillment of Tsi'yu Gunsini's prophecy.



On that March (17th) day the Tsalagi ceded hundreds of thousands of acres of their long-claimed hunting grounds between the Cumberland and Ohio Rivers to **Richard Henderson's** Transylvania Land Company primarily for the purposes of what then amounted to illegal land speculation.

A Rainbow for Beaverdam

No sooner had the Colonists gained their freedom than the State of North Carolina, feeling the typical smugness of victors, decided that it would claim all Tsalagi lands south and east of the Valley of the Holston and the French Broad River and leave the First Americans only a

reservation of "eternal" hunting lands to the west of the river. The Old North State thus forced the Tsalagi to accept the terms of its Land Grab Act of 1783, the primary motivation of which was to seize real estate with which to pay its Revolutionary War soldiers for what it owed them for their wartime service, which it did not have the money to honor. In truth, much of the land wound up in the hands of speculators who became wealthy for their ability to game the system.



East from Bull Gap

transportation – for Dragging Canoe's fears to become reality. As the last straggler walked out on her way west with the last rider and final wagon from the last stockade in October, 1838, the *Nunahi-duna-dlo-hilu-i*, the Trail Where They Cried, carried the memory of the great war chief's words. So strong was the attachment to their mountain home – so deeply visceral to the point of being physiological – that their cultural belief held that only as long as there were Tsalagi living in the fastness of the Smokies and surrounding mountains would the order of the universe remain

It took a mere fifty-five years – all long before the Internet and modern

intact. How fortunate for us that **Tsali** and his children, and others of their courage, hid so that the Qualla Boundary could eventually be created.

Home is where the heart is, literally; and so I am here, in these old mountains of the Blue Ridge. Do you know where “home” is; do you know where your heart is, really; what do you know about that place where you live, that place you call home? Have you touched its surface with your hands? Not the floor of your house; but the dirt outside, and across the street, and down the road. Have you tasted its air in the winds that blow around it? Have you watched its clouds and its precipitation patterns from day to day, month to month, season to season?



Peach Knob: Light of Late Afternoon

What are the waters of your home: creeks, rivers, lakes, or oceans? What are the watersheds that drain them; where does the water go when it leaves? How does the land of your home lie? Is it flat, does it roll gently or is it steeply folded? What are the soils like: sandy, loamy, red clay or black earth: acidic or alkaline? Is it underlain with sediment or rock: what kinds of rock – igneous, metamorphic, or sedimentary?

What are the plants that grow naturally where you live: trees, shrubs, flowers, vines? Are there exotics that have been introduced: what has their impact been? How does your climate affect these; your elevation?

What are the animals that share your home ground: mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds? Are they native or were they introduced? Which birds are year-round; which are migratory? What were they like fifty years ago? How have their numbers changed over time – your lifetime?

Who are the people who were there before you; how/when did they arrive?



Winter Comes to Patton Mountain

Why did they come; why did they leave; where did they go? What changes did they leave on the land?

How is the light of your home: in spring, summer, fall, winter? When does it change; how? Remember, this is your home; this is where you live; this is involved with and a part of who you are now. And if it isn't, can you truly call it “home?” What, then, is home, really?

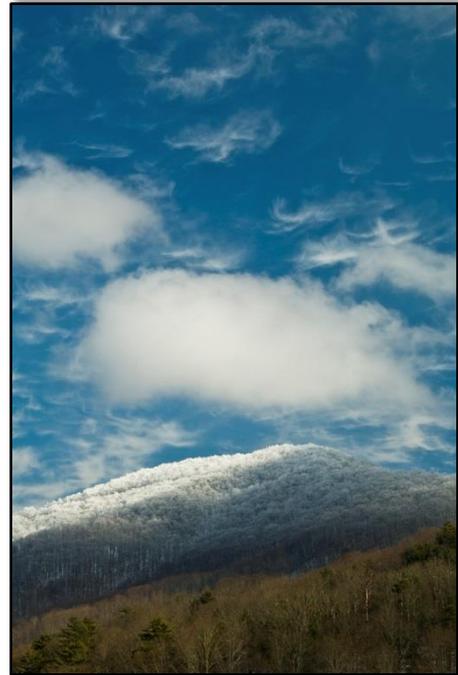
Rice Knob stands above the floor of Beaverdam Valley like a sentinel. I feel its presence as much as I see it; but looking eastward from our back deck it looms visibly above me like a great cumulus mass on a summer afternoon. At 4002' in elevation it is the fulcrum of the Elk

Mountains, the long J-shaped ridge that extends northward from the southern base of Peach Knob through Craven Gap and across Rice Knob into Roaring Gap, and then west-southwest until it plays out in Reynolds Mountain above the community of Woodfin, rising and falling, as it passes through Sassafras Gap, Elk Wallow Gap, and Town Mountain Gap along its way.

South of Peach Knob the ridge turns southwest across Meadows Mountain and over Rich Knob, running to Lewis Gap and then head-on into Patton Mountain. Patton turns it southward to become the long uplift dividing Asheville from the Swannanoa River Valley. Along this stretch, beginning at Peach Knob, the ridge is known as Town Mountain. At the turn, the lesser peak of Patton begins to play out toward the nearby run of the great French Broad River, the third oldest river on our planet, now wide and in its mid-life course flow.

From the rise of Patton Mountain, it is a casual glance across the open, westerly end of Beaverdam Valley to Killian Mountain and Reynolds Mountain, a thousand feet lower than Rice Knob and analogous to Patton in that it is where the northernmost of the parallel ridges divided by Beaverdam Valley starts its quick descent into the waiting bosom of the French Broad.

Even now, in the face of just over two hundred years of development by people, most of whom seem to have become, by degrees, less and less connected to the land around them, Beaverdam is still a beautiful valley. As I see it today, I also see it through all those flowing



Frozen Peach

years, and my heart is lifted.

High underneath the west-facing slope of Rice Knob is a spring that opens its joy to the downward tug of gravity on percolating water. The water bubbles forth from its metamorphic granite crypt and begins its journey, tentative at first, down the north side of Iron Ore Ridge, the short arm of Rice Knob that extends itself out into the middle of the valley. Reaching the floor of the widening bottomlands, the creek finds a leveling course in Linn Cove. Modern maps will tell you it's "Lynn" Cove and they won't be



Spring Finds Beaverdam

entirely wrong; but the early settlers knew it as "Linn;" and either way, it's in reference to their nickname for the linden tree, or, as most folks know it, the white basswood: a beautiful hardwood, once quite prolific in these mountains and cherished for its excellent timber.

As it begins to collect its lesser siblings, first from its own cove and then from Webb Cove on the other side of Iron Ore Ridge, at whose head Craven Gap offers a natural path through the Elks eastward into the Swannanoa drainage and might well have been the place where the first



humans to gaze into the beauty of Beaverdam came through, the seep on Rice Knob's shoulder becomes a full-fledged creek, the namesake stream of its valley.

For slightly more than a mile Beaverdam Creek flows a straight course directly down the valley until just after collecting Carter Cove Creek, it begins a twisting undulation as the valley itself narrows between the two opposing ridge spurs coming off Town Mountain Gap from the north and Patton Mountain from the south.

A Winter's Day in a Deep and Dark December

Geologists tell us that many thousands of years before the present a natural dam of earth and rock existed in this part of the valley, which formed an actual lake of the Upper Valley. As the ages passed, the dam was slowly eroded away until the lake drained leaving only a marshy wetland in its stead, which was exactly what the beavers were looking for. As settlers moved in after 1783, it was eventually drained and cleared of its many beaver dams until none remained and the valley floor was dry save for the watercourse of the remaining creek and its tributaries. The beavers never had much of a chance.

Below the Carter Cove Creek confluence, the valley had been a marshy slough for many millennia and had become the home to numerous beaver colonies each with its own piece of real estate. These small private swimming holes were also drained as settlement of Beaverdam Valley began in earnest, but the name stuck and refused to budge.

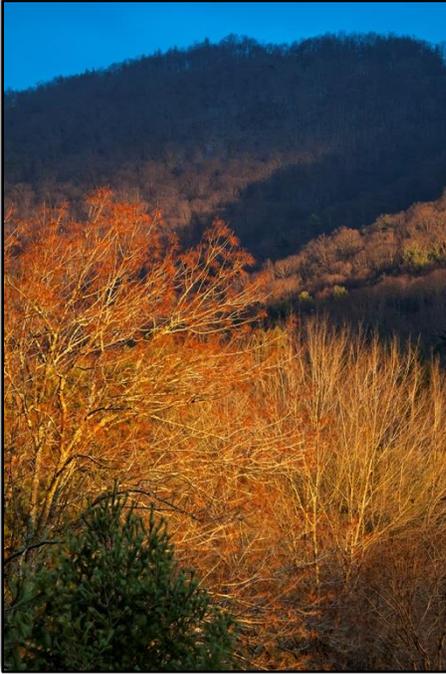
Castor canadensis is not just your average big, furry rodent by any stretch of the imagination. In a family of specialized critters, he is a specialist of the ultimate order.

Why don't we call him Bucky. Bucky and his clan are the largest of all the North American rodents, occasionally tipping the scales at more than 60 pounds. When Bucky was a young adult he met Rebecca. She's almost the size of Bucky, so it can be difficult to tell them apart when you see them together, but one good look and you know for certain that they are beavers. We often get bogged down in thinking that when we speak of "rodents" we are talking about rats and related critters we consider as vermin; but that's like saying that when we look at Appalachian



Craven Under Rainbow

mountain people, we are seeing through the derogatory lens named, “hillbilly,” an unfortunate caricature that is only stereotypically accurate and acutely non-descriptive of folks who live in the extensive hills that surround me, even if where they reside happens to have been fabricated on an assembly line.



The Richness of Light

the kits manages to survive to adulthood. As the colony expands it will consist of the newborns and possibly two years of adolescents.

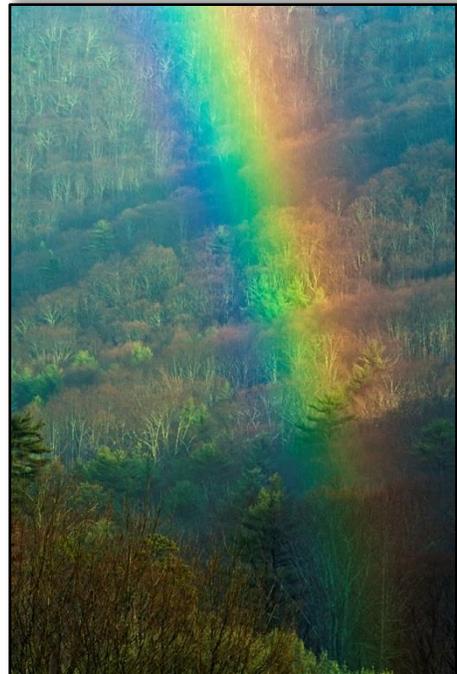
Aside from being the largest rodents on the continent, there are some other features that make beavers special. They have a broad, flat, paddle-like tail, which has evolved as a powerful swimming aid to go along with their hind feet, which are large and webbed. In times of alarm or danger the tail also doubles as an early-warning device generating a considerable report when slapped hard on the surface of water.

Beavers are adapted to their semi-aquatic way of life in some amazing ways: their underfur is extremely dense and soft. It is waterproof and sheds water very readily, although they must groom it daily; their eyes have transparent, nictitating membranes allowing ready vision underwater; when submerged they can close their ears and nose; and their lips can close behind their teeth which allows them to carry food while swimming. The high iron content in the enamel of their large incisors gives their teeth incredible strength for gnawing and cutting.

They are quite partial to the inner bark, twigs, and buds of certain trees: tulip trees (yellow

The rodents of North America include some highly esteemed families: the hamsters and guinea pigs that still claim considerable territory in the indoor pet world; porcupines that we adore from a distance as the swordsmen and archers that they are; squirrels of all stripes, who teach us patience and ingenuity as we work to keep our bird feeders filled and not their stomachs; prairie dogs, who help us understand the significance of communication and family bonding; and at the front of the line good old *Castor canadensis*, the humble, hard-working, animal-engineer-par-excellent, mate-for-life beaver.

Bucky and Becky met when they were about two years old – young adulthood in the beaver world – and for the next eighteen, or so, years they will remain together raising their families of up to nine kits annually, although attrition is typically high and only one to perhaps three of



The Refraction of Light

poplar), sweetgum, dogwood, beech, willow, maple, adler, and silverbell. However, during the summer months their diet will expand to include pond lilies, grasses, sedges, duckweed, algae, and other aquatic succulents. Pure vegetarians they are.



It is considered that in the entire animal kingdom, other than humans, no creature alters its living environment to a greater extent than the busy beaver. Their living quarters, or lodges, and the dams, which allow them to pond water in which to build those lodges, are masterworks of construction.

At one time in our history these structures would have filled the scene before me. Today there is not a single

Beavers are the Best Lodge Builders...

beaver, lodge, or dam to be found in the entire valley that bears its name. The only resemblance of such a thing is found at the very open end of Beaverdam Valley where the City of Asheville, by contract with the Charles Waddell & Company in 1923, dammed the small cascade of Beaverdam Creek known as Glen Falls, below which the stream slips around the low slope of Baird Mountain, a bump at the base of Reynolds Mountain, before turning west on its shallow descent into Tahkeesteh, the Tsalagi name for the waters of the French Broad downstream from Governor **Samuel Ashe**'s namesake town, known originally as Morristown.

In so damming, **John Nolen**, student and friend of the great landscape architect, **Frederick Law Olmstead** and quite likely with his master's planning assistance, established perhaps the oldest subdivision in the growing city, as well as a body of water where once had run Beaverdam Creek through an area known as Baird Bottom. Beaver Lake became, and still remains, the centerpiece of Lake View Park. Score: Nolen 1; Beavers 0.

However, I have jumped through a time warp and am way ahead of myself. If you travel eastward through the head of Beaverdam Valley and the notch of Craven Gap, where, today, America's most-visited national park unit, the Blue Ridge Park Parkway, traces a line northeastward through Bull Gap and across the shoulder of Bull Mountain on its way over the spine of the Great Craggy Mountains before skirting the Blacks, where Mt. Mitchell, at 6684' the highest peak in east of the Mississippi, broods like a sleeping giant, you will enter the drainage of the Swannanoa River.

Joseph Marion Rice was quite familiar with Craven Gap and the Swannanoa watershed. He had come to the Swannanoa Valley in 1782, and although he was on friendly terms with the Tsalagi, he was in fact illegally on the land. He apparently lived with a group of Shawnee (Shawano) who were in the area until gaining land of his own in the valley in 1784, following the Land Grab Act of 1783 already mentioned, making him the first European settler in that area. It would be sixteen years on that Joseph Marion would, one day in 1799 while hunting for meat for his family, kill what is regarded by many as the last bison living in Western North Carolina.

The names Bull Mountain, Bull Gap, and Bull Creek, just over the ridge from Rice Knob, are

testaments to the significant presence of these magnificent animals in these mountains for thousands of years. In April of 1838 Joseph Marion took a 100-acre land grant for a piece near the head of Beaverdam Valley; and while most of his descendants would remain on the Swannanoa, there would be a few who would go westward through Craven Gap to settle, ostensibly on that 100 acres. Just across the creek from our home, Rice Branch drains its small but constant volume into the larger creek. Up Rice Branch Road still sits the log home built in 1852 by **James Overly Rice**, grandson of Joseph Marion Rice and son of Joseph's fourth child, Reverend **William Rice**. This cabin is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

No one knows for certain when the remaining elk were eliminated in the larger Beaverdam Valley region, although local legend has it that sometime in the late 1700s the last elk in these parts was killed by Major William Mills in what is now the Mills River area south of

Asheville. **Ester Henderson Glenn** (1893-1987), a lifelong resident of Beaverdam, whose home was up on what is now Wolfe Cove on the south side of mid-valley, wrote in her memoirs of hearing stories told by her grandmother (**Mary Elvira Wolfe-Rice** 1818-1872) of her parents, **William Wolfe** and **Jane Hayes Wolfe**, Ms. Ester's great-grandparents,



Triangle d'Amour

watching herds of elk crossing over what is now Elk Mountain at Hayes Knob on the far side of the valley from their homeplace. At one time the great ungulates were apparently here in substantial numbers.

About five hundred yards up the road now known as Elk Mountain Scenic Parkway, which turns off Beaverdam Road and rises out of the lower valley to the northern ridgeline at Town Mountain Gap, and then follows the ridge all the way to its junction with the Blue Ridge Parkway, is the entrance to the homestead of **Daniel Killian**. Between 1791-1833, Daniel Killian owned 1,700 acres of Beaverdam Valley, but we remember him not so much for his property holdings, rather for his spiritual constancy. By the early 1790s he had completed his first log cabin on the Elk Mountain Road homestead and was busy raising a family with his second wife following the death of a first.

It was during these years that Killian encountered one of the legendary figures of early American evangelism, The **Reverend Francis Asbury**. Asbury was one of the first two bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States, appointed directly by **John Wesley** himself. In 1771 he had arrived from England and for the next forty-five years gave his life to his ministry in the early years of the American nation, serving particularly through the years known to history as the Second Great Awakening.

Occasionally by carriage, but more often by horseback, he traveled literally thousands of miles across the frontier, averaging annually, it is said, 6,000 miles year in, year out. He ranged the entire length and breadth of the original thirteen colonies and as new territories came under the control of the new Federal Government, his territory expanded with it to include Maine,

Tennessee, and Kentucky. His journal, kept over all those lonely miles and dreary days, is an invaluable resource for scholars seeking to understand what daily life on the edge of the country, as well as in its more developed places, was really like from a cleric's perspective.

November 9, 1800 is the earliest mention of Daniel Killian that I have found in those journals.

On that Sunday, Asbury mentions preaching at Killian's home, where the "Society," as this particular Methodist Episcopal congregation was known, met for services. Later, Killian would deed property not far from the homeplace to the Society for the construction of an actual church, now Asbury Memorial Methodist, which stands today as the third such structure erected on the site. Killian's was the first burial in the church's cemetery.

Between 1800 and Asbury's death in March, 1816, the esteemed minister visited Killian's home on at least a

dozen occasions, preaching and resting. Family lore tells that so regular were the visits that Killian even built a spare room onto the rear of the home just for Asbury and other itinerant ministers when they were traveling through the area. There is also, now kept at the church in an honored place, an armchair especially made by Killian for Asbury, who in his later years was beset with a chronicle of negative effects from all those years on horseback.

In the past two hundred years Beaverdam Valley has sired its share of notable North Carolinians: statesmen, generals, community leaders, and artists; and I can not do more than hit the highlights here. For instance, as I look from our deck directly up toward the heights of Rice Knob, my gaze sweeps over a two-story log cabin perhaps two hundred yards distant. It is old, but very well tended; it serves as a place for social activities for the condominium complex where we live. It is known as the Swain-Lane-Stradley House, and here is its story as written by **Rex Redmon**, whose *Beaverdam: Historic Valley of the Blue Ridge Mountains* has been a useful sourcebook in my education. Redmon is the great-great-nephew of Mary Elvira Wolfe-Rice, whom I mentioned previously, the wife of James Overly Rice.

The house was built around 1849 by **Reverend Thomas Stradley** and based on the "hall and parlor" design popular in Colonial America, although it has endured extensive renovation on at least one occasion. On the cabin's door is a plaque commemorating its significance as the birthplace of two highly-respected North Carolina native sons, **David L. Swain** and **Joseph Lane**. Swain and Lane were first-cousins: Swain was the 26th governor of North Carolina and also served for thirty-three years as the President of the University of North Carolina; Lane was a general in the United States War with Mexico, the first territorial governor of the Oregon Territory, and in 1860 the Democratic Party's pro-slavery wing's vice-presidential candidate. David Swain was born on January 4, 1801 and his cousin was born on December 14, 1801, just over eleven months later.

It is true they were born in the same log cabin, but not the log cabin that stands today in Beaverdam Run. Their respective parents lived in a two-room, side-by-side log cabin that had

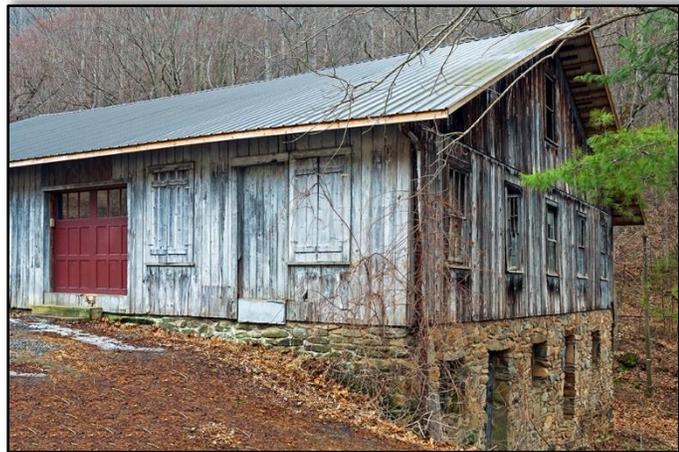


White Rice

been built prior to 1800 by George Swain, David's father. It was likely of the style common to the southeastern piedmont and mountains in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, known as a dog-trot. When Reverend Stradley built his cabin in 1849, the Swain-Lane cabin was already half-a-century old, and it stood quite near the Stradley structure gradually falling into greater and greater disrepair until it was torn down sometime around 1950 according to the memory of Rex Redmon. The Stradley cabin is listed on the North Carolina Register of Historic Places, and I confess being curious as to the documentation supporting the listing. Its age and state would be sufficient in my own mind, but not for the other events claimed to have occurred there.

Beaverdam has one more child whom I could never neglect mentioning, and she is what, more than anything else, connects me to this valley, this land, all the elk and all the beaver I will never see here except in my mind and in my heart.

When **Wilma Dykeman** was born in Asheville in 1920, her father **Willard Dykeman**, a transplanted New York widower, was fifty-seven-years-old. Her mother, **Bonnie Cole**, was a life-long Beaverdam resident, Willard's second wife, and thirty-six years younger than her husband. Yet the one thing she knew from childhood, irrespective of her parents' ages, was a love for writing and a love for the natural world instilled in her by both.



Ms Wilma's Apple House

It was in August, 1940, soon after her graduation from Northwestern University, that she met her future husband, **James R. Stokely, Jr.** who lived in Newport, Tennessee just down the French Broad from Beaverdam. They had been introduced by **Mable Wolfe**, a sister of Asheville's literary son, **Thomas Wolfe**. Wilma and James married two months after they met and were together for thirty-seven years until Stokely's death in 1977.

I met Ms. Wilma twenty-one years later, in 1998, the first year of my five-year tenure as the Staff Photographer of Friends of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, on whose Board of Directors she had served for several years. Her obvious love for all the valley of Long Man, the river of her home, the lifeblood of the entire region, was contagious and never failed to reach out and touch those with whom she interacted. I had already read and loved *The French Broad*, her masterpiece of storytelling, before I met her; and so it was like making a connection with the very spirit of the river itself. I could not have known that nearly fifteen years later I would find myself in the valley of her childhood, living within sight of the land that nurtured her, encouraged her, and fed her the experiences that would flow from her pen in such beautiful prose.

When she passed away in 2006, she was laid to rest on the sloping rise of Lewis Memorial Cemetery behind Beaverdam Baptist Church on the south side of mid-valley, and every day that I pass by on my way to the wider world I greet the memory of this wonderful daughter of these old hills and all that she did to help the rest of us understand the unbreakable connection between earth, water, and sky in this valley and in the entire planet around us. Are we not all *The French*

Broad? Wilma Dykeman wrote this,

“More and more as droughts descend and populations increase and water becomes what it has never been in this region before – a valuable commodity because of its scarcity – people will begin to realize the simple logic and necessity of ‘washing our waters.’

...Pollution is an ugly word. A sick word. A dead one. And the French Broad is a beautiful river. But there is no health in ignoring sickness and merely hoping it won’t spread. There is no honesty or courage in denying death and hoping it won’t be noticed, won’t reach any farther. There is only one respectable course for a free citizen and that is to shoulder his share of the responsibility for the ‘killing,’ for the pollution. Because just as the river belongs to no one, it belongs to everyone – and everyone is held accountable for its health and condition.”

And I believe it is the same with Beaverdam, with this valley I love, these old Elk Mountains of the Blue Ridge, these creeks where *Castor canadensis* frolicked and fed, these basswood and poplar and pine, these ancient granitic rocks and their pressure-altered ancient kin. And I believe it is the same with where you live as well; but how will you do this if the place where you live is not known to you. As the maxim instructs: In the end we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught.

Or what we bother to teach ourselves.



Two Creeks for Beaverdam

What’s Now...?

Something’s Telling Me It Might Be Spring

Color is the language of light; it adorns the Earth with beauty. Through color light brings its passion, kindness, and imagination to all things: pink to granite, green to leaves, blue to ocean, yellow to dawn. Light is not simply a functional brightness that clears space for visibility. Perhaps of all the elements, light has the most refined imagination; it is never merely a medium. Light is the greatest unnoticed force of transfiguration in the world: it literally alters everything it touches, and through color dresses nature to delight, befriend, inspire, and shelter us.

John O’Donohue
Beauty: The Invisible Embrace

It is roughly 720 miles from Lilburn, Georgia to Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, and a full 7° of latitude south to north between the two towns. Great Smoky Mountains



National Park lies about one quarter of the way and closer to Lilburn. So here's the deal: **Punxsutawney Phil**, the great weather prognosticator of the Mid-West has given his annual Groundhog's Day prediction that there will be six more weeks of winter. Meanwhile, **Beauregard Lee**, Georgia's somewhat lesser known seer, has weighed in that there is sure to be an early spring; and in both cases all is predicated on the presence or absence of a personal shadow.

Winter's Cloud

So, take your pick. If you want to say that the proximity to Georgia gives "early spring" the edge, so be it; but then if the Smokies elevation edges their climate more toward Pennsylvania's northern latitude, then winter it's going to be. I'm still of the thought that spring will arrive a bit ahead of schedule in spite of the fact that during the past week we had four consecutive days during which the mercury did not top the freezing mark and two straight nights of sub-zero overnight lows. The next six weeks will surely tell the tale.

By the end of May when the next ***Song for the Asking*** is due out, all of the seasonally-closed roads in the Smokies will be open. Clingman's Dome will reopen on April 1, 2015 (weather permitting). Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail is slated to reopen on May 1, while Balsam Mountain Road will open on May 22, as will Heintooga Ridge Road. Little Greenbrier Road and Rich Mountain Road will both reopen on April 10, while Round Bottom/Straight Fork Road will be available on April 3. If you have any question about a road closure in the Park, call **(865) 436-1200, Ext. 631**; or listen to the menu and select **Option 2** and then **Option 2** again.



Frozen Liquid Sunshine

For the next month, roads such as Newfound Gap Road (US441), Cades Cove Loop Road, Little River Road, Laurel Creek Road, Tremont Road, Greenbrier Entrance Road, Big Creek Road, Deep Creek Road, and Cataloochee Entrance Road are all open, **weather permitting**. Access to Mingus Mill near the Oconaluftee Visitor Center is also

available. There are some wonderful photographic opportunities in these areas from high-elevation grand landscapes to stream imagery to intimate forest landscapes. Black and white conversions are excellent possibilities for the coming weeks. Macro images also abound in leaf-litter, seed pods, cones, buds, and many other elements, including some of the very early blooms of hepatica (*Hepatica nobilis*).

As March turns into April, wildflower season will begin to swing into full-tilt with the early ephemerals: bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), trout lily (*Erythronium umbilicatum*), wood anemone (*Anemone quinquefolia*), trailing arbutus (*Epigaea repens*), the dicentra twins: squirrel corn (*Dicentra canadensis*) and Dutchman’s britches (*Dicentra cucullaria*), and, of course, the early violets (*Viola*) and trilliums (*Trillia*). There are almost more than can be listed here. Among my favorites is the delicate crested dwarf iris (*Iris cristata*). All of these will be blooming, or will have come and gone by mid-to-late April. If you will attend to my weekly Image for the Asking, I will try to keep you abreast of what’s current and where.



Seasonal Indicator Sans Peer

As the season turns to spring and the vernal equinox balances our nights and days, the sunrise/sunset opportunities in the Smokies become much more interesting.

Date:	<u>March 1</u>	<u>March 21</u>	<u>March 31</u>	<u>April 30</u>	<u>May 31</u>
Sunrise:	7:04a.m.	7:36a.m.	7:22a.m.	6:43a.m.	6:20a.m.
Sunset:	6:27p.m.	7:45p.m.	7:53p.m.	8:18p.m.	8:42p.m.

Daylight Savings Time begins on Sunday, March 8 and remains in effect for the entire months of April and May. The nearest days to actual equinox hours are March 17th and 18th when Sunrise/sunset comes at 7:42a.m./7:41p.m and 7:41a.m. /7:42p.m., respectively.

The times in the above chart are for the **Oconaluftee Visitor Center** located at the Cherokee Entrance to the Park on US 441. Actual times in the Park will vary by a couple of minutes depending on your specific location.

For the month of March, there is no really good sunset location in the Park that can be gained without a substantial hike. Sunrise during March and April from Luftee Overlook on Thomas Divide can be an amazing experience. The sun is rising directly down the upper valley of Beech Flats Prong during March and slightly to the left of the valley for most of April; and when atmospheric conditions are conducive, this can make for some spectacular opportunities. By May, the sun is rising a bit too far to the left at Luftee, but by that time Clingman’s Dome Road is open and the parking lot at the Dome is a prime

sunrise spot. It's not bad, either, as an alternative location in April.

As for sunset in the coming quarter, I've already mentioned the lack of good opportunities during March; however, in early-April, around the 5th or so, the late-



afternoon sun will set to the northeast of Sugarland Mountain which is on the south side of the valley of Walker Camp Prong. Morton Overlook will again be the prime sunset location in these hills, and from then until the beginning of September it will remain so.

I want to mention just a few of my favorite wildflower hikes in the Park. These are places I have visited repeatedly over the years and have found them to be filled with great opportunities if your visit is timed well: **Cove Hardwood Nature**

Just Air and Opportunity

Trail (Chimneys Picnic Area) is my gold standard for early-spring ephemerals.

Porter's Creek Trail in Greenbrier has a magnificent array, including the best fringed phacelia (*Phacelia fimbriata*) in the Park. **Chestnut Top Trail**, at the Townsend "Y," for the first mile of its climb is as good as it can get in the early spring. On the North Carolina side, **Bradley Fork Trail**, which starts at the back of Smokemont Campground, has some very interesting patches and outcroppings. **Huskey Gap Trail** between US 441 and Little River Trail has some wonderful offerings. Finally, **Schoolhouse Gap Trail** from Laurel Creek Road to the Park boundary offers some excellent opportunities, especially in mid-to-late April. All of these and many more make it abundantly clear why it has been suggested on more than one occasion that it should have been named

"Wildflower National Park."

As May approaches, be sure to keep in mind that eye-catching event known to mountain folks as "greening up the mountains." As the new growth begins to take hold in the valleys it starts to sweep up the slopes – at a rate, it is said, of 300' (linear) per day. It's like watching the mountains have their own St. Patrick's Day parade and it's beautifully photogenic. I can think of no better palace along the parade route than the overlooks that line Thomas Divide on the North



Carolina side of Newfound Gap as well as Morton Overlook on the Tennessee side.

Starting from the Bottom

For me spring is amazing and spectacular whenever it arrives; and the fun, as well as

the challenge, is in trying to guess Mother Nature's next move and the timing with which she will respond. **John Shaw** has said for many years, "If you want to be a better nature photographer, become a better naturalist." The joy of being in the natural world never ceases, and when you begin to have some comprehension of the workings of that world, the joy is magnified. It manifests itself in insight and flexibility, and through these your growth as an artist expands immeasurably.

A Tip is Worth...?

Art & Photography: A Path of Obligation

Exalted individualism...is hardly a creative response to the needs of the planet at this time, which demand complex and sensitive forms of interaction and linking. Individualism, freedom, and self-expression are the great modernist buzzwords. To highly individualistic artists, trained to think in this way, the idea that creative activity might be directed toward answering a collective cultural need rather than a personal desire for self-expression is likely to appear irrelevant, or even presumptuous. But I believe there is a new, evolving relationship between personal creativity and social responsibility, as old modernist patterns of alienation and confrontation give way to new ones of mutualism and the development of an active and practical dialogue with the environment.

Suzi Gablik

The Reenchantment of Art

Ricardo Semler is a radical thinker in the best sense of the term. Radical, as it is properly understood rather than in the usually negative political sense, comes from the Latin "radix," meaning "root," giving us words like "radishes." To be radical is to go to the root of things, to search for what is fundamental and basic; and Ricardo Semler thinks at the root of things, especially the roots of the culture the modern world has fallen head-over-heels to create. On the path he has chosen, he has taught at places like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and he has taken a run-of-the-mill company started in Brazil by his father from \$4 million in revenue in 1982 to \$212 million in revenue in 2004, when he turned the day-to-day operation over to others.

In October, 2014 Semler was invited to give a TED presentation on some of his thoughts on how to run a company, on being an entrepreneur, and on being human. Among his many profound observations was this: "I accumulated a lot of money, when I think about it. When you think and you say, 'Now is the time to give back.' Well, if you're giving back, you took too much...I like sharing as you go



Early Light in Hemphill

better.” Perhaps that’s just too radical for American sensibilities, but is it really?

For the next little while I want to think about the path of photographic creativity as a path of obligation: What do we give? What do we gain as we walk this path? What do we owe for the privileges that have been showered upon us? What is our relationship as artists to the larger society of which we are part? As Ricardo Semler posed in his presentation as the quintessential question of humanity, what are we here for?

We hardly ever call forth these questions as we sit hunch-shouldered over our cameras concentrating deeply on the beauty of a tiny blossom, or stand in awe before the vastness on a grand landscape; but they are with us all the time, and even if we do not feel compelled to wrestle with them continuously, I believe it is essential, if we are to fulfill our roles as creative beings, to address them regularly, to see where we stand in our appraisal of ourselves and our art, and their places in our community.

In what is easily my favorite book on the creative process, *The Widening Stream*, **David Ulrich** talks about the Hawaiian concept “kuleana,” for which there is apparently no direct English



Falling Down Estatoe
images that would not exist except for you. Still another perspective: Your skill,

equivalent. It expresses “my privilege, my honor, my duty, my responsibility, my place.” However it goes beyond the traditional Western concept of these, which usually imply an obligation and nothing more; and thus are the opposite of honor or privilege. In Hawaiian culture, kuleana signifies a merging of these seemingly opposing states into a single conceptualization: I am honored that it is my place to...do this.

A Jewel of a Weed

Maybe you never think of yourself in this way, but you are in fact a being of cultivated sensitivities. You feel some form of special connection between yourself and the natural world. Look at what this means from several different perspectives: Because you possess these sensitivities, society needs for you to share them and the form that sharing takes is in your created works and your understanding of the creative process. Another perspective is this: there are animate forces in the world – cultural, material, and spiritual – that need you for their expression, that will not, nay cannot, be expressed without you;

knowledge, and insight must be passed on to others, and ultimately to future generations if you wish to take your proper place in the on-going stream of life. These are the intersecting threads that draw together the artist and the community into the fabric of the world of being human. The notion of the artist as the solitary culture hero, living in idealized romantic hermitage is no longer valid.

Reflect for a moment on the role of visual communication in our culture. If there was ever any doubt as to the impact of all of this information on our cultural attitudes and perspectives, those doubts surely have been erased in the face of the myriad studies conducted by social psychologists and sociologists over the past half



Winter in Spring Creek Gorge

century, or longer; and we have long-known that much of this impact is as subversive and unconscious as it is pervasive and created to be intentionally so. These ever-present images do affect us and they do contribute to the formation of our social selves. They do color our attitudes about who we are, and what the world is like, and how we interact with one another. As makers and receivers of these images ourselves, do we wish to

perpetuate the preponderant negative leanings, thinly veiled self-aggrandizements, and cynicism?

If we wish to confront these, we have to be willing to be more responsible and more conscious, and, indeed, we cannot hope to do the first without working diligently to achieve the second. They are connected.

Seeing how we are shaped by the world becomes fairly straightforward as we begin to get to know ourselves better, which is often accompanied only by the passage of years.

Seeing how we shape our world can



Becoming Evergreen

be a more difficult matter; and by this I do not so much mean the exterior contours of that world as the interior ones.

As we are incognizant of our own contradictions, our biases, our deeply held attitudes, our lack of awareness of others and our imperiled environment, our self-centeredness, we unwittingly give form to the world around us. What we see in the world around us is, in truth, what we, ourselves, are. The world becomes our perfect mirror. As **Walt**

Kelley's wise possum observed many years ago, "We have met the enemy, and he is us." The culture we have is the culture we create and have created.

As photographic artists we have the wonderful opportunity to have a positive impact



An Ephemeral Carpet

on all of this, but the one absolute necessity to bring this about lies in seeing and knowing ourselves as well as we possibly can, in becoming more conscious of our deeper potential, in becoming more clearly aware of how we contradict ourselves, of our negative attitudes, of our hypocrisies, of when we are inconsistent. As David Ulrich reminds, "We can only understand the world and its people to the degree that we can understand ourselves. To begin to see in this way is one of the great, humbling experiences of being human. It can be a source of real anguish and the beginning of what we might call *productive* suffering, for it brings with it the possibility of real compassion and genuine empathy, toward ourselves and each other, toward our societal conditions, toward our upbringing, and toward the state of the planet."

To begin to see in this way is to begin to give ourselves the possibility of making a difference in ways we may not yet even begin to understand.

I am of the opinion that there goes with the creation and teaching of art a principled philosophical mandate to do so in ways that are responsible; and I believe this because the arts have a primary role in our society. Ulrich's delineation of this role is as comprehensive and clear as I have found: "...they offer knowledge, insight, beauty and humor, and provide a means of understanding ourselves with greater clarity. They teach us about peoples of varying backgrounds and help us live together with greater understanding and compassion. They hold a mirror to and challenge the society from which they arise and offer a means of questioning the world around us. Finally, they hold the potential to provide hope and inspiration in an unsettled world and deeply enrich the lives of people."

Art, photographic art, your art has the potential to do any of this at any moment. What a powerful voice you possess when you give yourself permission to be heard; what an amazing gift you have to offer to a world in much need of uplifting voices.

There are in this path two perils I believe we have to recognize and avoid. One is the inclination to create in order to please others, which is to say solely, or even primarily, for recognition or approval; and the other is the inclination to believe that we are completely aloof from and owe nothing to the concerns for our audience and our community. What is demanded of us is genuine authenticity: creativity that arises from and is guided by our deepest impulses, but which is tempered by our own vigorously evaluated understanding of what responsibility to ourselves and others sincerely entails.

To avoid these perils is to grow as an artist, to engage in a tacit understanding and compact with society that what you offer is your deepest form of connection with the world in which you live, and you offer that connection in the advancement of the communities of which you are a member. In so doing the answer to Ricardo Semler's radical query, what are we here for, will perhaps become self-evident.

As for EarthSong/Walking in Beauty... **Walking in Beauty**

Being an artist carries with it a great potential and a great obligation.... In a culture made up of images, sound, and stories created by artists who do not hold themselves accountable for that very culture, we have a set up for destruction.

Suzanne Lacy

Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art

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 me
Beauty is on every side
As I walk, I walk with beauty
Traditional Dine' Prayer

The 2015 EarthSong Photography Workshop schedule is about to switch into high gear, and Bonnie and I are very excited about the year ahead. You may notice that we are spending greater time in the Southern Appalachians this year. As we thought about what we wanted to accomplish with this year's schedule, it just felt right to do what we are doing, so there are several opportunities for everyone to join us in our backyard. These include the magic of Appalachian barns, the wondrous beauty of the land of waterfalls, and the splendor of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. We hope you will plan to spend some time with us in our neck of the woods.

Here's what one of our participants has written, "This was my second week-long workshop and I enjoyed so much seeing the improvement in my photographic skills led by a knowledgeable and fun leader. His gentle and incisive way of instruction has opened up a new field and passion that I never experienced. I'm 83 and only wish I had started attending these workshops decades earlier."

And just for good measure, here's another, "Don is an extraordinarily attentive and dedicated teacher. He was determined to help each student achieve his or her potential."

Our first workshop of the New Year is a repeat of the first barn workshop we ever did, but there's a new twist: we've added a full day and re-arranged the schedule a bit to include a second critique. This change was initiated from feedback we have received from other participants.

March 19-22, 2015;
Appalachian Barn Right of Spring Workshop;
Asheville and Madison/Haywood County, NC;
Participants: 8;
Tuition: \$425

From our participants during the first barn workshop year we have learned that an additional day in the field and an additional critique session would be welcome new features; so this is what we have done. We will begin on Thursday evening (19th) with our opening gathering. On Friday (20th) we will work with the barns until early afternoon and then go into the classroom for image processing and an initial critique that should add significantly to the experience of Saturday's (21st) fieldwork. We will be in the field all day on Saturday with the barns and then return to the classroom on Sunday for a second critique session. I'm really excited about this new format and look forward to trying it out in real time. Contact: don@EarthSongPhotography.com; (828) 788-0687.



In the Shed

This year we are going back to our roots, at least photographically speaking. We're doing a Spring Wildflower workshop in Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

March 28-April 3, 2015;
Spring in the Smoky Mountains Workshop;
Lodging Location TBA;
Participants: 8;
Tuition: \$1295

I am, first and foremost, a photographer of the Great Smoky Mountains and have been photographing professionally in them for over twenty years. For five of those, I served as the staff photographer for Friends of Great Smoky Mountains National Park. I have hiked nearly all of the nine hundred miles of maintained trails in the Park and backpacked extensively in it. This Park is the back of my hand; and more than almost anything, I love sharing it photographically and otherwise with everyone I can. We will spend a week exploring the streams, early spring flowers, high country, spring atmospherics, and light of this most visited national park of all.



Ol' Smokey Days

Contact: don@EarthSongPhotography.com; (828) 788-0687.

I have realized that once Cape Cod gets in your blood the only way to effectively respond is to return regularly. Our Fall 2013 workshop was a great success, and so we've decided to return in the spring (at least Cape Cod's spring) of the coming year, because the Cape in spring is an amazing place.

June 20-26, 2015;
Spring in Cape Cod – The
Outermost House Workshop;
Lodging Location TBA;
Participants: 8;
Tuition: \$1295

Cape Cod sits like a raised forearm extending into the Atlantic with fingers pointing back toward the Massachusetts mainland. As Henry Thoreau keenly observed, "A man may stand there and put all America behind him." Cape Cod is a place of great history, extreme beauty, and a diversity of culture that make it, in my mind, one of the premier photography locations in the country: from towering sand dunes to relict forests wonders to historic structures that include a collection of some of the finest lighthouses in the country to cozy fishing villages to lazy marshes where wading birds feed and rest to pristine beaches of rock and sand that bear the brunt of mighty storms. Cape Cod is all of this and more. It is the outermost house.

Contact: don@EarthSongPhotography.com; (828) 788-0687.



Duck Harbor Grasses

We seem to have started a tradition of doing a mid-summer workshop in the Southern Highlands, which we have called "Wildflowers, Waterfalls, and Western North Carolina" because it's located in Transylvania County, North Carolina, the Land of Waterfalls, and it also features the mid-to-late summer wildflowers of DuPont State Forest and the Blue Ridge Parkway. The tradition continues.

August 14-16, 2015;
Wildflowers, Waterfalls, and
Western North Carolina Workshop;
Brevard, NC;
Participants: 8;
Tuition: \$350

I don't think anyone has ever seriously challenged the claim of Transylvania County, North Carolina to be the "Land of Waterfalls." When the movie producers were looking of the best location to show the journey of **Hawkeye** in **James Fenimore Cooper's** epic, *Last of the Mohicans*, they chose Triple Falls. When I think of summer wildflowers in abundance, I think of the



Hawkeye's Run

Blue Ridge Parkway as it winds its way along the northern boundary of this lovely county on its way to the Smokies. Some of the most enticing high-elevation scenery anywhere is found along that same road as it tops out on Richland Balsam, the highest point along the entire Parkway. This workshop is instructional, fieldwork, and critique all in one fun-filled weekend.

Contact: don@EarthSongPhotography.com; (828) 788-0687.

Did someone say “September?” It must be time for a barn workshop. The first September barn workshop we did was a great lot of fun. The weather was perfect and the barns put on quite a show; so we thought we’d offer another one. Except this time we’ve added a day, which can only make the whole experience better.

September 10-13, 2015;
The Appalachian Barn – Cusp of
Autumn Workshop;
Asheville and Madison/Haywood
County, NC;
Participants: 8

Tuition: \$425

By the time this workshop begins I will have scouted quite a few additional structures that were not available during the first of year of these events. So even if you attended one of the earlier adventures, the barns you will see here will probably be almost completely



Barn Dance Anyone?

different. My friend, **Taylor Barnhill**, has been busy adding new structures to the Barn Alliance’s lists, and we’ll keep adding them to ours. With the addition of the second full day to the workshop, we’ll also build in a second critique session. I can’t say we’ll have twice as much fun as with the originals. That might be impossible; but we’ll have more fun than ruby slippers on a return trip from Oz.

Contact: don@EarthSongPhotography.com; (828) 788-0687.

Now here’s something to really set off some fireworks for you. It’s actually a



double event, but it can also be considered as two very separate and distinct happenings. Over the past three years I have had the chance to spend quite a bit of time in the Desert Southwest, particularly in Northwestern New Mexico and Southern Utah. I have long felt a strong attraction for the immense beauty of this amazing part of our country and have immersed myself in it whenever I could. For instance, I spent nearly the entire month of May in these areas, exploring the lesser known back roads and out-of-the-way spots, as well as the more iconic locations. I have now put together back-to-back weeklong tours, which can be taken together, or separately:

October 17-23, 2015;
The Awesome Canyon Country of
Southeastern Utah;
Moab, UT;
Participants: 7;
Tuition: \$1500



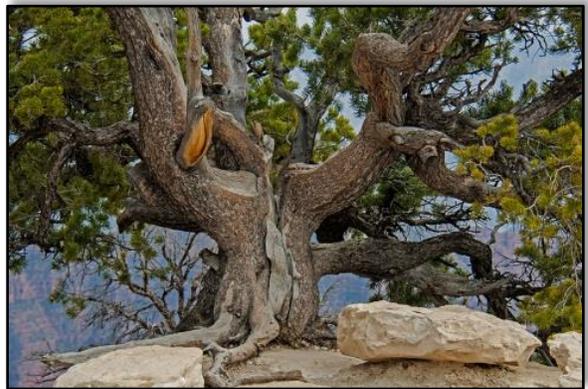
Ode to a Dead Horse

October 26-November 1, 2015;
The Heart of the Desert Wild;
Kanab, UT;
Participants: 7;
Tuition: \$1500



Up the Grand Staircase

October 17-23 and October 26-
November 1, 2015;
Both Tours Together;
Moab and Kanab, UT;
Participants: 7;
Tuition: \$2500



Not in Brooklyn

Now, here's the macaroni and cheese of the thing: I will drive from Asheville and will be leaving on October 10th. If anyone wishes to meet me in Amarillo, TX, on October 11th and continue the journey to Moab over the following six days, for a special tuition of **\$400**, I'll share my adventure across northwestern New Mexico that will also include time in Palo Dura Canyon, TX; Taos, NM (2 days); Chaco Canyon, NM (1 ½ days); Hovenweep National Monument, UT (½ day), and anywhere else we decide to linger.

Of course, Bonnie and I will have made all the necessary arrangements such as lodging along the way and the best places to share meals as we travel. One caveat: you will definitely need a 4-wheel drive vehicle for either of these adventures. We will also have made the arrangements for our time in Moab and Kanab. We will be glad to help with making connections with other participants to facilitate traveling.

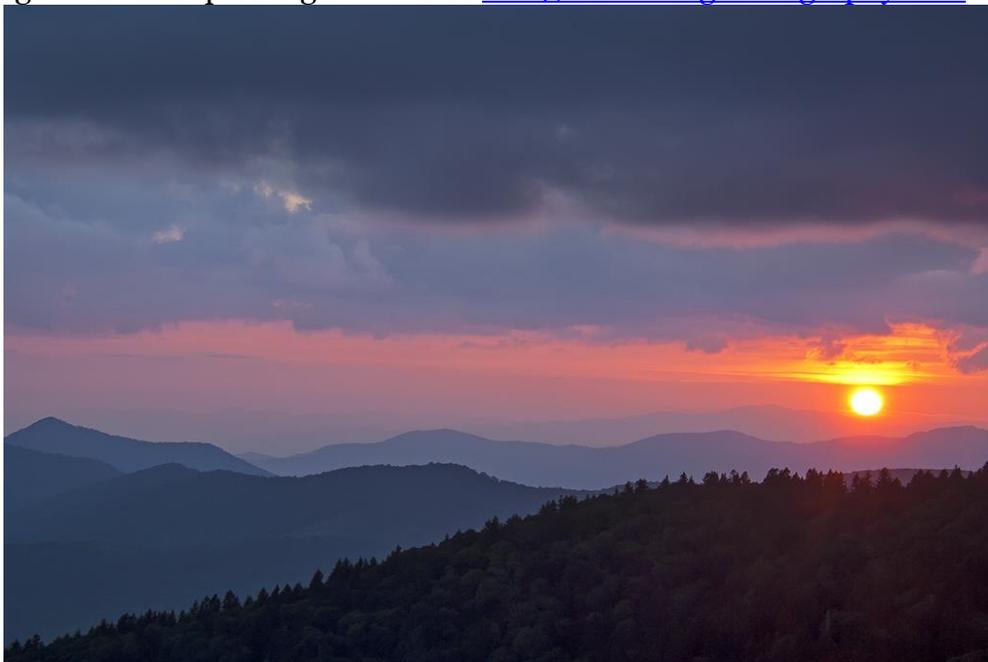
Your expenses will be your tuition, lodging, all travel expenses, meals, and entrance fees to public lands requiring an admission fee. I will be your guide and will offer in-the-field coaching/instruction, and in-the-field critiques of your work.

This is an incredible opportunity to spend one week, two weeks, or nearly three (3) weeks photographing in some of the most amazing geology on Earth; and I'll share with you the many secrets I've learned from years of research and months of presence on this sacred ground.

Contact: don@EarthSongPhotography.com; **(828) 788-0687**

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

This newsletter is being sent only to those people who have expressed an interest in receiving it. If you no longer wish to receive it, you can be removed from the mailing list by sending an email requesting removal to don@EarthSongPhotography.com.



Sunset, Cowee Mountains Overlook, Blue Ridge Parkway, NC