



The Newsletter of E.J. Peiker - Nature Photographer

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Welcome to the quarterly newsletter from E.J. Peiker, Nature Photographer and www.EJPhoto.com. In this quarterly publication, I share with fellow photographers my photographic experiences, photo equipment reviews, photo and processing tips, and industry news. I also inform subscribers about upcoming workshops and products that I offer. Please feel free to forward this to other photographers and interested parties but please do so only by forwarding this newsletter in its entirety. All content is copyrighted by E.J. Peiker and may not be reproduced. If you would like to be added to the mailing list, unsubscribe, or access back issues, please visit: www.ejphoto.com/newsletter.htm



Unterseen, Switzerland (Sony a7R, Zeiss 24-70 f/4)

Looking Back On A Busy Spring

It was a very busy Spring 2014! The Spring Equinox occurred while I was still in Iceland for my annual Winter trip (see the Spring 2014 issue of the newsletter for my write-up on that - <http://tinyurl.com/prk2s39>). April was dedicated to bird photography. First I traveled to North Carolina to visit the world's largest waterfowl breeding organization at Sylvan Heights Bird Park where they have a mind boggling array of waterfowl species from all over the planet and are engaged in keeping some greatly declining species viable with enough genetic diversity. Sylvan Heights has large natural habitats appropriate for each continent's waterfowl. Additionally, there was a Garganey on North Carolina's barrier islands which is a species I had not previously photographed.

Shortly after returning from North Carolina. I flew to Houston for the annual Spring Warbler migration where I once again shot this spectacle with friends Brian Small and Alan Murphy on Upper Gulf Coast private property for 5 days. We photographed a number of warbler species as well as many other songbirds and even a cooperative Clapper Rail (http://www.ejphoto.com/clapper_rail_page.htm), which is

usually a very reclusive bird.



Painted Bunting (D800E, 500mm)

It wasn't as hot this year as the previous year which made for relatively comfortable shooting in the blinds. A great time was had by all.



Schloss Oberhofen on Lake Thun (a7R, 24-70mm)

A week after returning from Texas I was on my way to Germany for a family reunion where I saw some relatives for the first time since I was a teenager in the 1970's and met many of my cousin's kids for the first time. It was a really fun time. While there, I did some extensive walking and photographing the very historic and over 2000 year old city of Augsburg, the city I was born in. Unfortunately my planned trip to photograph some of Germany's castles was a weather washout but I tried anyways and got some record shots but nothing like I was envisioning. After the reunion I drove to Switzerland (<http://tinyurl.com/lqzlkua>) for a week, a country I have been in but never photographed in. I based myself out of Interlaken and made day trips in all directions. Mountain landscapes and castles (<http://tinyurl.com/pc2n3a7>) were my photographic targets. The weather cooperated for at least some of the time. While I got some nice mountain landscapes, the light wasn't in my favor and the Swiss have a talent of putting power lines and cable cars into every pretty scene. I am, however, very pleased with the castle shots I got as well as some of the architectural shots in Interlaken.

At the end of May, I also went on a photographic weekend with friends to Canyon X in Northern Arizona. Canyon X is a wonderful slot canyon, similar to the Antelope Canyon complex but without the ridiculous masses of people. It is a guided trip where only 6 people a day can enter and you visit two different arms of this very deep slot canyon. The trip was timed to be able to photograph some of the season's first light beams that make it all the way to the Canyon floor around celestial noon. The clouds stayed away to allow us to get some great shots. While in the region we also visited the Horseshoe Bend of the Colorado River south of Page. This spectacular overlook is always a jaw dropping view, especially for first timers which the friends I was with were. We are integrating Canyon X into this year's Arizona Navajo Country and North Rim Grand Canyon Workshop (<http://tinyurl.com/jwcuul2>).

I was invited by Carl Zeiss AG to participate in a 5 day long press event in May in Kenya to launch a new line of high end Zeiss binoculars - the Victory SF (8x42 and 10x42). I was to be one of a handful of photographers representing every continent at the event along with a who's who in the birding press world. Unfortunately, terrorist activities in Kenya, which have been on a disturbing trend of late, cancelled this event. Instead the event was held in central Europe starting at the Zeiss Sports Optics factory in Wetzlar, Germany (http://www.ejphoto.com/wetzlar_page.htm) where we got to tour the factory floor. We then moved on to Austria and Hungary for some serious birding with the new binoculars.

Wherever close enough approach was possible, we also did some bird photography including a European Bee-eater colony that allowed reasonable approach. The new binoculars are truly exceptional and beat anything on the market for birding. They are purpose built for that task and as such feature a wider and brighter image. But what was most impressive to me was a new optical design which moves some key optics from the objective end (the end away from your eyes) to the ocular end (the end closest to your eyes) resulting in a perfectly balanced binocular which requires no force to keep level and thus provides a much more stable image. I was able to hold 10x42's more stable than I can hold traditional



Canyon X (D800E, Zeiss 21mm)



European Bee-eaters (D800E, 500mm, 1.4x)

8x32's. For more info on these amazing binoculars visit: <http://tinyurl.com/pvxstej>

Despite all of the travel, I was also able to squeeze in a number of private clients for consulting services and private workshops and teach my Outdoor Flash Photography class in Tucson.

The Summer months promise to be very busy as well with a California trip, nearly a month in Iceland, and my Arizona Navajo Country and North Rim Grand Canyon Workshop along with commitments for some photographic products companies.

Rediscovering My Origins

I was born in 1960 in Augsburg, Germany, just 15 years after World War II destroyed significant parts of this historic city. Augsburg's origins go all the way back to two decades BC. It has survived the Roman Empire, the Dark Ages, Medieval Times, the Crusades, the Renaissance, the Industrial revolution, two devastating World Wars, and now the Technological Revolution. The city's population is just a bit over a quarter million today, about 60,000 people more than when I lived there in the 1960's. It hosts structures that are still in use that were started in the 4th century as well as the world's oldest Social Settlement where the rent today is identical to what it was in 1521 when it was built - the buildings are still the same buildings! Augsburg is located in Bavaria, close to the Austrian border and about 40 miles west-northwest of Munich.
http://www.ejphoto.com/augsburg_page.htm



Fuggerei - World's Oldest Social Settlement (a7R, Zeiss 24-70mm)

While I was aware of, and had visited most of Augsburg's historical structures when I was young, before moving to the USA just before my 9th birthday, I of course lacked the capacity to appreciate the historical significance of it all at such a young age. In May I traveled back to where I was born for the first time in two decades and for the first time ever with the intention of learning about it and photographing it. My father's side of the family was having a family reunion and I decided to attend it to reconnect with relatives, some which I had never met and some which I hadn't seen in as much as 37 years, as well as walk all over Augsburg with my Sony a7R and Zeiss 24-70mm lens in hand. The craftsmanship in the old structures such as churches, town, halls and settlements is mind boggling by today's standards. The sheer size of some of these buildings is beyond comprehension when you factor in where they were built. Overall it was an enriching experience that left me with a much greater appreciation of my heritage.



Augsburg, Germany Aerial Panorama (a7R, Zeiss 24-70mm - 9 vertically stitched shots)

Doing Well In Camera Club Competitions

For several years now, I have been judging camera club competitions for several Camera Clubs in the USA. I am often asked after the competition why a certain photo didn't do as well as the photographer thought it should or sometimes just to get some real feedback since the competition itself doesn't usually provide

much insight beyond a score. I thought I'd write down some tips to increase reader's scores and some common things that I see as flaws when judging competitions for those of you that participate. Tips for doing well in photo competitions aren't very different from tips to produce good photographs in general. Here are a few items to take into consideration...

Let's start with the most common flaws that I see:

- Poor digital processing. This includes strong sharpening halos, JPEG compression artifacts, blocked up shadows, blown highlights, overly contrasty images, flat images, unrealistic "neon" colors, excessive noise, shadow/highlight tool halos, etc... If you want good scores, as much care should be taken in the presentation of the image as you took in the taking of the image.
- Poor exposure control. It is common to see images that are significantly overexposed completely blowing out brighter areas that should have detail or underexposure which blocks up darker areas that should have detail.
- "Wonky" horizons. If you are submitting a photo with a clearly delineated horizon, make sure it is level. If any of the judges are experienced landscape photographers, an out of level horizon basically eliminates the possibility of a top score.
- Lack of a clear subject. Just because you can shoot something with a 14mm lens doesn't mean that your subject is suited for it. Quite often, ultra wide shots result in drowning out your subject. Use a focal length that appropriately defines your subject. If a photo has no subject that is clearly understood by the viewer, it is not likely to do well.
- Truncated composition. Subjects that have important parts cut-off or are simply way too close to the edge of the frame give the photo a "stuffed in the box" appearance.
- Poorly lit subjects. Photography is the art of recording light. Subjects that are taken in harsh light or dappled light or not lit in an attractive manner won't score well. These tend to lend themselves better to black and white than color.



Some suggestions for selecting and preparing your images:

- Finish processing your photos for projection or print and then walk away from the image for an hour or two. Then come back and look at it with a critical eye and fix any problems you find.
- We are often emotionally attached to photographs because we were there in the moment which produces a more complete response and experience when viewing a photo of it since we associate it with a good or exciting moment. The viewer was usually not there with you so try to emotionally detach from the event and look at it critically as if you were not there since the judge will be in that situation. Now reassess whether or not somebody that wasn't there will find this an excellent photograph. Even seasoned pros can get caught up in this.
- Stick to the subject if entering your image in a specific category. If the photo doesn't conform to the subject, it can't be scored high no matter how good it is. Most judges give an incredible amount of leeway here but make sure to select an image that a detached viewer, the judge, will recognize as being in the category.

- Look for unique photos, compositions, subjects, etc - most judges are very experienced and have seen it all, so to say; so something that is different and well presented will tend to do better.
- If you know who your judges are going to be, look up their work. By knowing what style they prefer, you might be able to get a small leg-up on the competition since an image presented in the way they do will psychologically influence that judge without them even knowing it. But don't go overboard here, judges tend to give higher scores for something completely new but make sure the quality is there.
- In many cases providing a sense of scale helps define the photo. In the old days, putting a person dressed in red in any landscape photo to provide scale was essentially a rule if you wanted a high score on a landscape shot. While this is no longer the case with the vast majority of judges, there are many ways to provide a sense of scale. There are still a few that require that for a high score but this is just about eradicated at this point.
- In a landscape competition, you may have a truly great shot of something iconic like Delicate Arch in Utah or Oxbow Bend in Wyoming but most judges have seen literally thousands of images of these spots. It is not likely to wow them no matter how good your photo is unless it is truly a new take on the subject - see uniqueness above.
- Process your images on a properly profiled and calibrated monitor. Prints made from images prepared on a typical office monitor at default brightness will have a tendency to look dark and muddy. Images prepared on an overly bright monitor when projected on a calibrated projector will also look too dark. Soft proof your prospective prints and make any final adjustments through the eyes of your paper and ink profile. Insist that your camera club calibrates its projector. If that can't be done, figure out if it is projecting too bright or too dark or has a typical color cast and either get the club to fix that or prepare your images to negate the poor calibration of that projector. It shouldn't be that way but sadly, many clubs skimp when it comes to a projector or its calibration - often due to limited budgets.

Most of all, have fun with the competition! Don't get too down if you don't win or even never win. Seek out the judges afterwards, most are very willing to give you polite critical feedback that can only improve your photography. Don't get into a one up-man-ship mentality. I have actually witnessed photographers physically destroying a scene so that other members in the club can't take the same or a similar shot. I have seen photographers try to play mind games to psych other photographers out of certain shots. It can get ugly out there. Most clubs are not like this but believe me, some are very much like this. Use these competitions to enhance your skills, get others to see your work and again, have fun!

Nissin i40 - The Best Compact Flash

Nissin is a Japanese company that has been producing professional flash gear for nearly 50 years. While it has been a popular brand in Asia, it has not found a strong foothold in North America, primarily due to cheaper Chinese products and hype over flash units sold by the camera manufacturers themselves. North American distribution for the Nissin line of flash products is handled by Minox, North America (ironically, like Zeiss, also based in Wetzlar, Germany). I have long wanted a full featured compact flash for travel for my Nikon bodies but Nikon, like Canon and the other camera manufacturers, cripple their compact flash units by not offering all of the modes that their very expensive and large high end units do. In some cases you lose high speed sync, or manual flash control when going with smaller lighter flash units. And you always lose a lot of flash power.



Sony a7R with Nissin i40 on left and with SB900 on right

After using my a7R with the Nikon SB900 flash, I was unsatisfied. The combination is very awkward to use since the flash is bigger than the camera and with batteries is about the same weight as the camera resulting in an unbalanced rig. The Sony compact flash is an underpowered and awkward unit so I wasn't interested in it. One day while perusing DPRReview I saw an announcement of a high powered compact flash unit by Nissin called the i40. It intrigued me but after looking at the product on the DPRReview pages I dismissed it mainly due to its ancient looking mechanical dials on the back. Continuing to use the SB900 on the a7R and the very poor balance, caused me to return to the i40 and give it another look. I ultimately decided to order a Nikon mount unit (also available for Canon) since Nikon flashes can be used in auto mode on newer Sony cameras (but without TTL function) and because the Sony version was not yet available. I received the flash and started using it and absolutely love it. Not only is it very well balanced on the a7R, it is much better than the built in flash on the D800E offering much more flash control, including full manual, high speed sync, ETTTL, and pretty much all of the capability of the three times as expensive SB900 in a much smaller package. The head articulates and swivels in all directions like high end flashes. It is still a lot smaller than the lower spec and more expensive Nikon SB700 and is significantly more powerful with a guide number of 40 meters (130 feet). It is also much more fully featured and powerful than the compact Nikon SB400 and SB300. Power output is really amazing for such a small unit. It ships with the same accessories that Nikon and Canon flash units ship with including diffuser, wide angle screen, bounce card, case, and more. Build quality is first rate and gives up nothing to the more expensive camera manufacturer's flash units.

After using this flash, I have become a big fan of the mechanical control dials rather than a multi button LCD screen interface. Changing flash modes, compensation, etc are instant with a quick turn of the dial rather than a multitude of button pushes. The left smaller dial controls the flash mode, and the right larger dial controls either compensation or manual flash power - it really couldn't be simpler. I am now convinced that our big high end flash units should go back to manual controls like this. If there is one very minor complaint,

it's that compensation or manual exposure control is in half stops instead of 1/3 stops but that really is a very minor quibble. 100% Sony compatible units will be shipping in the next few weeks and I will order a second one dedicated to the a7R and dedicate the Nikon interface i40 that I already own on my D800E's.



The Best Lenses For Your Nikon and Canon Cameras

There are no changes to the best lenses table for this quarter:

Lens Category	Canon EF Mount	Nikon F Mount
Ultra Wide Prime	Zeiss 15mm f/2.8 ZE	Zeiss 15mm f/2.8 ZF.2
Extra Wide Prime	Zeiss 21mm f/2.8 ZE	Zeiss 21mm f/2.8 ZF.2
Wide Prime	Zeiss 25mm f/2 ZE	Zeiss 25mm f/2 ZF.2
Moderate Wide Prime	Sigma 35mm f/1.4	Sigma 35mm f/1.4
Standard Prime	Zeiss 55mm f/1.4 Otus	Zeiss 55mm f/1.4 Otus
Portrait Prime (short telephoto)	Canon 85mm f/1.2L II	Nikon 85mm f/1.8G
Medium Telephoto	Zeiss 135mm f/2 Apo Sonnar ZE	Zeiss 135mm f/2 Apo Sonnar ZF.2
200mm Prime	Canon 200mm f/2L	Nikon 200mm f/2G
300mm Prime	Canon 300mm f/2.8L IS II	Nikon 300mm f/2.8G VR
400mm Prime	Canon 400mm f/2.8L IS II	Nikon 400mm f/2.8G VR
500mm Prime	Canon 500mm f/4L IS II	Nikon 500mm f/4G VR
600mm Prime	Canon 600mm f/4L IS II	Nikon 600mm f/4G VR
800mm Prime	Canon 800mm f/5.6L IS	Nikon 800mm f/5.6E VR
Wide Angle Zoom	Tokina 16-28mm f/2.8 ATX Pro FX	Nikon 14-24mm f/2.8G
Standard Zoom	Canon 24-70mm f/2.8L II	Tamron 24-70mm f/2.8 Di VC
Telephoto Zoom	Canon 70-200mm f/2.8L IS II	Nikon 70-200mm f/4G VR
Super Telephoto Zoom	Canon 200-400mm f/4L Extender	Nikon 200-400mm f/4G VR II

Upcoming Workshops

I continue to offer workshops in some fantastic destinations through NatureScapes Certified Workshops. Click on the Workshops below for all of the info. For the complete schedule of Workshops offered by NatureScapes, please click <http://www.naturescapes.net/workshops/>

Ultimate Iceland Adventure: (July 7-19, 2014 - Sold Out)

Our 2014 Iceland adventure is sold out and we are selling 2015 slots fast. See below for my very unique 2015 Northern Iceland Arctic Adventure.

Navajo Country And Grand Canyon North Rim: (Aug 23-28, 2014):

I am very excited to take this workshop up another notch this year with the inclusion of the private and exclusive Canyon X slot canyon. We will start the workshop photographing the Horseshoe Bend of the Colorado River. We will then explore the exclusive Canyon X slot canyon. It is majestic like the upper Antelope Canyon but with no crowds making photography a pleasure rather than a frustration. We will likely be the only ones in this 150 foot deep slot canyon. Then we will visit the incredible red rock formations of the mystical Monument Valley deep within the Navajo Nation. Not only will we photograph some of the well known and iconic spots such as The Mittens, Merrick Butte, and Sentinel Mesa, our experienced Navajo guide, who is also a photographer and works with the film industry, will lead us to shooting locations that one is not permitted to go to on their own. This opens up many possibilities for unique images of this spectacular area. After leaving Monument Valley, we will conclude the workshop at the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. Much cooler and less crowded than the overcrowded South Rim, the North Rim offers unparalleled views of the canyon and there is the possibility of photographing wildlife and wildflowers as well. For all of the info, please visit here:

http://www.naturescapes.net/workshops/arizona_grand_canyon_2014

Canadian Rockies - Banff and Jasper: (Oct 4 - Oct 11, 2014):

Nestled in the heart of the majestic Canadian Rockies, Banff and Jasper National Parks are a dream destination for photographers looking to photograph rugged landscapes and iconic northern wildlife. The trip will start in Banff with visits to classic locations such as Lake Louise, Vermilion Lake, Peyto Lake, and more. Time permitting we will even visit the spectacular Kananaskis Country of Southern Alberta. There we'll have ample time to experience and capture some of North America's most beautiful and iconic wilderness landscapes before heading up to Jasper to focus on wildlife.



In Jasper, we'll have opportunities to witness the world's largest bighorn sheep rams and see the elk and moose where spectacular mountain backdrops provide the perfect setting for incredible photographs and an unforgettable experience. Everything you need to know here: http://www.naturescapes.net/workshops/banff_2014

Arizona DuckShop: (Jan 18-21)

Join NatureScapes' Technical Editor and widely acclaimed professional nature photographer, E.J. Peiker, for this exclusive Phoenix, Arizona DuckShop!™ This 3-day DuckShop™ will put you right where you need to be to walk away with breathtaking images of an array of ducks, waders and other species at some of the best hot spots in the U.S.!

The Phoenix, Arizona area is a very popular winter home for many species of waterfowl and they'll be all decked out in full breeding plumage! Possible species include Northern Pintail, American Wigeon, Ring-necked, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, Canvasback, Lesser Scaup, Mallard, Mexican Duck Hooded Merganser, Cinnamon Teal, Green-winged Teal, Bufflehead, Redhead and many other bird species. Get all the info here:

http://www.naturescapes.net/workshops/arizona_duckshop_2015

Northern Iceland - Arctic Adventure: (May 27- June 14, 2015)

We will soon be taking registrations for this workshop in 2015. Join NatureScapes.net co-founder and Technical Editor E.J. Peiker and Iceland's world renowned Ornithologist and photographer Jóhann Óli Hilmarsson on a very unique and diverse Northern Iceland Workshop. This workshop has it all, from the most spectacular and powerful waterfalls in all of Europe, to one of the richest waterfowl breeding lakes in the world, to cliff dwelling birds such as the colorful and comedic Atlantic Puffins, Razorbills, Murres and many other sea birds and Arctic species. It is also one of the most spectacular landscape spectacles on the planet. Upon arriving at the modern Keflavik International Airport, our journey starts in the capital city of Reykjavik. After photographing geothermal features and local waterfowl in the area, our journey takes us north to the amazing Hraunfossar waterfall complex and then onward to the north and east, ultimately ending up at the edge of the Arctic Circle in the Mývatn area where it will be light 24 hours a day. We will make plenty of stops to photograph amazing sites like



Godafoss and the incomparable Icelandic Horse along the way. Mývatn will provide us opportunities to photograph multiple waterfowl and grebe species in a spectacular environment. This area also boasts some of Iceland's most interesting geothermal features and beautiful landscape photography opportunities including Europe's most powerful waterfall and several other spectacular waterfalls that stand with the world's finest. After three days in this vicinity we work our way west, stopping to photograph along the way, to the Vestfirðir Peninsula where we will photograph the amazing Dymandi waterfall complex which, at this writing, only the NatureScapes workshops offer, and then on to one of the major highlights of all NatureScapes Iceland tours, the Latrabjarg sea cliffs featuring the Atlantic Puffin at close range and many other cliff nesting and other species. After 5 full sessions of photography in this area, we will depart for the small and incredibly quaint island of Flatey where we will spend the night. Our past participants universally regard Flatey as a major highlight of our Iceland adventures. After departing Flatey and working our way back to Reykjavik, we will visit the Snaefellsnes Peninsula for numerous landscape opportunities as well as some potential sea bird opportunities. All the info is one click away:

http://www.naturescapes.net/workshops/iceland_adventure_arctic_2015

Stay tuned on the NatureScapes Workshops Page for more amazing workshop announcements in 2014 and 2015!!! <http://www.naturescapes.net/workshops/>

Private Photography Instruction and Consulting Services

In addition to the photo workshops that I launched over 10 years, I also offer private instruction in Wildlife and Landscape photography at the place of your choosing within the USA and Canada. These private workshops are of the one on one variety (or two on one). Clients may schedule time in 4-hour time blocks for either classroom or field sessions. With just two people, a number of shooting locations become possible that aren't possible for larger groups and thereby making it possible to photograph some species or locations that are not attainable with larger groups. More specific instruction, based on the client's specific needs, can be given using this delivery method in either the classroom or in the field. For more information please see the following link: www.ejphoto.com/duckshop_private.htm

I also offer both photo equipment and computer workstation/digital darkroom consulting services. This allows me to combine my 27 years of work in the computer industry with my lifetime of photographic experience and provide services at a technical level that are hard to find elsewhere. Contact me for rates and specifics or visit my rate sheet:

<http://www.ejphoto.com/Quack%20PDF/Rate%20Schedule%202014.pdf>

Two eBooks Now Available

Be ready for Duck Photography with my eBook "**Ducks of North America – The Photographer's Guide.**" It is an essential text that covers all of the techniques needed to get the best shots of waterfowl and birds in general. It covers every species in the wild and in captivity in North America and gives species specific tips on how best to capture them and where to find them. Eleven years in the making, this book is a great tool for the beginning, intermediate or advanced waterfowl photographer. The tips in it are easily applied to all birds and most other subjects too. It sells for \$30. While this is expensive for an eBook due to the incredible amount of time and money it took to create it, it will easily save you 10 times that in aggravation, time, and failed attempts.

I have also released my previously privately published paper book "**West – A Collection of Photographs From The Western United States**" in a fully updated and revised eBook version. It is available for \$10.

Both books can be ordered from the fine outlets you will find at this link:

http://www.ejphoto.com/ebook_page.htm

Facebook Page

On my Facebook Fan Page, I am keeping those interested up to date on what photo excursions I go on as well as short commentaries on a variety of photo related subjects and tools. I also have nearly 100 galleries accessible through there. Please visit:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/EJ-Peiker-Nature-Photographer/150804446733>

and if you like what you see, please click the "Like" button.

Image Recovery from CF and SD Cards

Let someone that worked as a professional in the computer industry for more than a quarter century and has a multitude of tools available attempt to recover images from your damaged, formatted, or corrupted media cards. There is a basic \$25 charge for the analysis. If I determine that I can recover images, I will recover them, with the card holder's approval, for an additional \$75.

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E.J. Peiker conducts consulting services and product design services for a number of photographic product companies. The companies change from time to time:

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Those that know me know I would not endorse a product even for compensation if I did not feel it were a superior product.

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Bernese Alps, Switzerland (a7R, Zeiss 24-70mm, 6 vertical stitch frames)