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The Newsletter of E.J. Peiker - Nature and Travel Photography

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Summer 2023 - Vol. 22, Issue 3  
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Welcome to the 22nd year of the photography newsletter from E.J. Peiker, Nature & Travel Photography and [www.EJPhoto.com](http://www.EJPhoto.com). In this publication, I share with fellow photographers my photographic experiences, photo equipment reviews, photography tips, processing tips, and industry news. All content is copyrighted by E.J. Peiker and may not be reproduced but it is permitted to forward this newsletter in its entirety only. If you would like to be added to the mailing list, unsubscribe, or access back issues, please visit: <http://www.ejphoto.com/newsletter.htm>



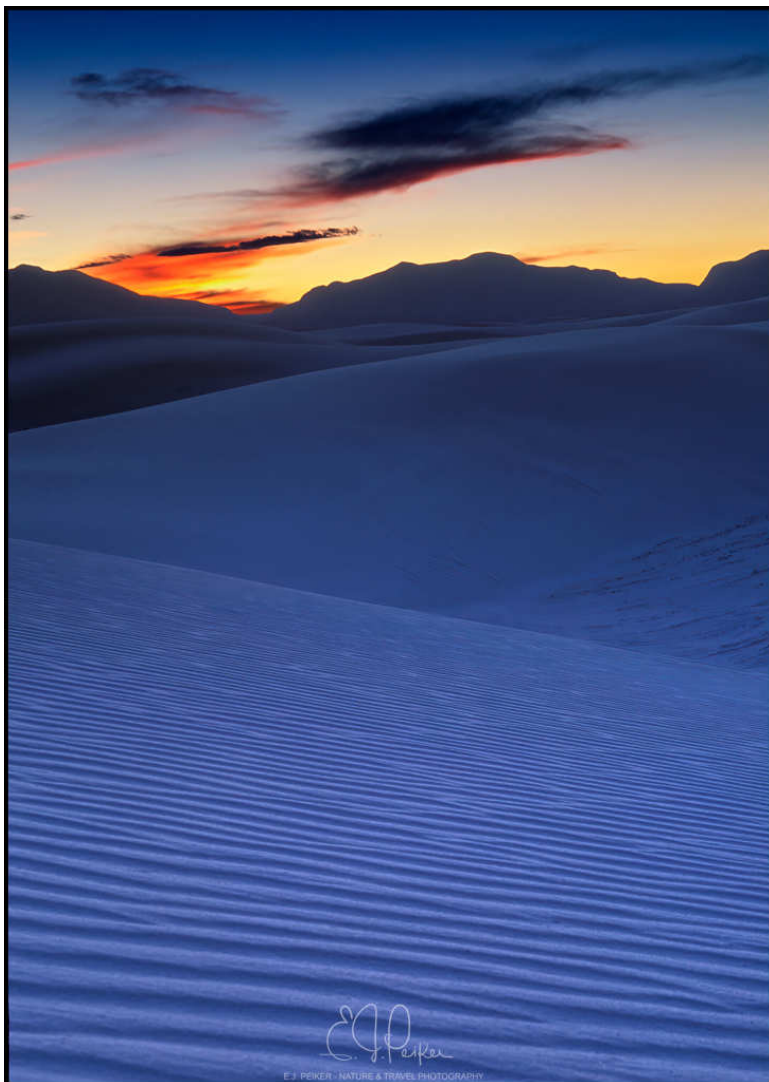
Superstition Mountains – Arizona (a7r5, 17 – 28mm)

## In the Field

The spring wildflower season in Arizona was above average but, for the most part, not at the superbloom level that was predicted based on the winter rainfall. This was due to a record cold February and overnight freezing temperatures into early March right after the seedlings started to sprout. On the bright side, the massive amounts of rain and snow in the high country has left lakes and reservoirs the fullest they have been this century and some lakes that have been dry for the last 30 years are actually nearly full.

My photography was still nowhere near as prolific as I had hoped due to the continuing recovery and caretaking needs due to my significant other's injuries sustained just after the new year and by the time she was fully mobile again, we were into the hot and very windy mid to late spring in the Sonoran Desert.

Since I don't have much new stuff to share in this part of the newsletter, I thought I'd go through my favorite photograph from each of my 22 years as professional nature photographer. In this issue I will cover the first 11 years, and the second 11 years will be covered in the Autumn issue.



2001 - In December of 2001 I took this photograph in White Sands National Monument, now a National Park. This is a film image after sunset. It was purchased by the US Navy and stylized with the USS New Mexico nuclear submarine surfacing out of the sand for the christening of that vessel.



2002 – While attending a Jasper National Park wildlife shoot with Charles Glatzer and Tom Hill in October 2002, I broke away one early morning and did the relatively short hike to the eastern end of Pyramid Lake in Jasper National Park, Alberta, Canada after an overnight freeze and snow at the higher elevations to capture this perfect reflection shot of Pyramid Peak.



2003 – In July of 2003 I traveled to Texas’ Rio Grande Valley for the first time and on the first evening, just as I was getting set-up, this Pyrrhuloxia poked its head out from behind a Prickly pear Cactus and I was able to get this single fun frame. It has been published numerous times including by Audubon.



2004 - In June 2004, I flew to Denver for two weeks of photography along the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains. On the very first day, after landing I drove straight up to over 13,000 feet in attempt to find Mountain Goats before they shed their winter coats. More on this photo in “The Story Behind the Picture” later in this issue.



2005 - I went to Africa for the first time - Tanzania. One of my most successful mammal photographs was taken during this trip. My safari vehicle was stopped at a watering hole that had a couple of mostly submerged hippos in it. Zebras were drinking but every time the hippos would rise up, they all bolted and then slowly worked their way back. I decided to pan with a single animal when the herd bolted. Using a slow shutter speed I isolated a single Zebra while allowing the others to blur.



2006 – While visiting Yosemite over Thanksgiving weekend, enjoying the very low level of people during this time, I noticed an area where I could get a great reflection of iconic Half Dome but the area was closed. When a park ranger came by, being the only person around, I asked if I could enter the area for photography and he granted me permission allowing me to get this shot with the last vestiges of fall color and alpenglow at sunset.



2007 – I had many favorites in 2007 but I chose this Harp Seal photo I took in March of that year on an ice flow in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence because it is my single most commercially successful photograph I have ever taken. At last count it was published over 50 times all over the world – one of the few times a single image has paid for the entirety of a trip many times over.



2008 – My first of 13 trips to Iceland was in June 2008. I have many photographs from that journey but this particular one of a Razorbill pair at the edge of a very large cliff face brings back great memories and always puts a smile on my face. It is the perfect subject for a future “Story Behind the Photo”



2009 – I ventured to the Falkland Islands (also known as Islas Malvinas) in early 2009 with local photographer and long time friend Cindy Marple to photograph the wonderful array of wildlife on these islands in the South Atlantic. We took the long arduous 4 wheel drive trek to a beach abundant in several species of penguins but my favorite shot of the entire trip is this King Penguin couple strolling down the beach. It reminds me of a couple that's been together forever just having a chat as they take a walk.



2010 – Up to this point, the 2010 favorite was by far the most difficult selection as there are several photos from this year that are all-time favorites of mine from several different far reaching places on our planet. Ultimately I chose a local shot of a Green Heron precariously balanced on a small stem hanging down over a pond stretching in order to catch a fish.



2011 – Another tough year to choose a favorite from but for many photographers a trip to Antarctica is a trip of a lifetime and this definitely goes down as one of my most memorable journeys. This photograph, taken around 4:30AM after the sun had risen over the Antarctic continent while I was literally the only person on deck, stands out as one of the most memorable sunrise events of my life.

In the fall issue I'll cover the remaining years from 2012 to today. This exercise is proving to be more difficult than I thought as some years were very prolific years with significant travel to far away places and incredible experiences.

## Gear Talk

Since I am no longer doing photography professionally and also getting older, I noticed that I virtually never reach for my Fuji medium format gear anymore. While the image quality of the 102 megapixel system is beyond reproach and I absolutely love the system, when given a choice of more than double the weight for the same focal length range as a Sony a7R5 at 62 megapixel with a similar range, I always reach for the easier to carry Sony gear, usually with the exceptional lightweight Tamron lenses (see last quarter's newsletter for a weight and size comparison of various lens options for the Sony system). It was difficult to let go, but I sold all of my Fuji gear. I do still have some support gear such as batteries, L-brackets, etc which are for sale in my ongoing "garage sale":

[https://www.ejphoto.com/gear\\_for\\_sale\\_page.htm](https://www.ejphoto.com/gear_for_sale_page.htm)

It has been a long time since Nikon introduced a truly exciting camera that I would want to buy. While I am no longer in the Nikon ecosystem, if I were, I think I'd sell the Nikon cameras that I have and replace them with two of the new Nikon Z8 cameras. It is essentially a fully fledged Z9 in the size of a normal camera, not the large behemoth that is the Z9 that I would never dream of buying due to its heft. I can't find many faults with this camera other than that it is still stuck at 45 megapixels while competitors have gone beyond that but then 45 megapixels is still adequate for almost all uses. The one spec that does let me down though is the viewfinder resolution which is only 3.7 million dots, far short of the competition which is virtually always between 5 and 10





million dots, the latter presenting an image in the viewfinder that looks so natural, it can be mistaken for an optical viewfinder.

The headline specs for the Z8 are as follows:

- 45.4 megapixels
- Full frame stacked CMOS sensor (14 bit)
- Base ISO 64 (ISO 32 – 102,400 range)
- 6 stop In Body Image Stabilization
- Electronic shutter only (1/32,000 to 30 sec)
- 493 phase detect autofocus points (-7 to +19 EV detection)
- AF auto-detect for people, mammals, birds, airplanes, motorcycles, cars, bicycles, trains
- 8K/30P, 4k/120P, 2K/120P video in multiple formats including RAW
- 3.6m dot EVF, 3.2" diagonal 2.1m dot rear LCD
- 2.0lb, 5.7"W x 4.7"H x 3.3"D
- \$4000

While I have not handled a Z8, it has the classic Nikon ergonomics which are arguably the best in the industry and the Nikon menu system which is among the more intuitive.

The second interesting product introduction this quarter is the Sigma 14mm f/1.4 lens for Sony FE mount and L-mount. This is the fastest ultra-wide 14mm lens on the market for full frame cameras, surpassing the popular 14mm f/1.8 lenses most night sky photographers have in their bags. It does accept rear mounted filters and is being marketed almost explicitly for wide field astro photography. It has a tripod collar which will balance it much better on star trackers thereby improving their accuracy which is important with a heavy 2.5lb lens. The lens is literally built like a tank with a large bulbous front element to collect all of the light an f/1.4 lens must collect without massive distortion. Linear distortion is surprisingly well controlled and is exceptional by f/2.8. A great feature is that you can lock the focus ring and it stays locked even with the camera in AF mode. This is important as often, in astro photography, one often goes to great lengths to find perfect infinity focus and then if the camera goes to sleep or you turn it off, a focus by wire system will try to autofocus as soon as you turn the camera back on.

On many cameras this can happen initially even when placing the lens in manual focus mode. Sharpness is exceptional in the center and still very good in the corners when shot wide open at f/1.4. Again, at f/2.8, center and corner are absolutely superb. There is about a 1.5 stop light roll-off in the corners when shot wide open which also largely clears up by f/2.8. Of course, RAW converters will automatically compensate for this once this lens is put into their lens correction databases. Chromatic aberration is outstanding throughout the aperture range. Most important for many astro photographers is coma distortion - the smearing of a point light source, especially in the corners. Tests show that this lens is an exceptional performer for coma, even when shot wide open at f/1.4. It seems that, unlike most fast ultra-wide lenses, this lens can actually be shot at f/1.4 with great results. I think this is going to be an incredibly popular lens in the astro crowd. I will likely stick with the superb Sony 14mm f/1.8 simply because it is much smaller and less than half the weight while only giving up about 2/3 of a stop.



## Digital Darkroom

There isn't much new to report on the digital darkroom front this quarter. I mulling around the idea of finally discarding the tried and true Photoshop CS6 that I am still using. I have never upgraded to the subscription based Adobe CC model partly because I hate subscription based software, partly because I do 90% of my work within Capture One and only use Photoshop as a host to plug-ins that I might need, and partly because I don't really need the features that Adobe has added since their last non-subscription based version of Photoshop. When I do need a function that I can't do in CS6, such as median pixel averaging for the elimination of moving subjects from a frame, I simply fire up my old version of Affinity photo and do it there. However, more and more software is not supporting CS6 anymore including the latest versions of the Nik plug-ins by DXO and some Topaz software. Will I go to CC? Probably not! I am definitely going to give the new version of Affinity Photo (v.2) a try before I would even consider that. Feature for feature, it does everything Photoshop does for a onetime fee that is very affordable and it does support the same plug-ins. While I have used Affinity Photo v1 quite a bit, it has always been for specific tasks that I can just quickly look up how to do. But I have not taken the time to know it well enough to use in a streamlined fast workflow simply because I know Photoshop so well. Time will tell when I will embark on this learning project but if it comes to fruition, I'll certainly report on it here in the newsletter...



### The Story Behind the Photo

About 19 years ago, I decided it was time that I got some Mountain Goat shots in their full winter coat. Mountain Goats tend to shed their furry winter coat when it warms up in early June and since they live at such high elevations in the southern Rocky Mountains, it is often a race between roads first opening in the late Spring and the goats still being bushy for winter. I knew from research that some of the most accessible Mountain Goats were on the way up to the Mt. Evans along the highest paved road in the USA which goes all the way up to 14,130 feet.

I kept my eye on when the road would open and checked every few days all through May then on May 30 it was announced that the road would finally open on June 1. I bought a plane ticket which would put me on a flight to Denver in just 30 hours and frantically got hotel and car reservations, packed and landed in Denver around 9:00AM on June 1. I got in the car and drove straight there and encountered my first Mountain Goats around 12,000 feet, well above timberline and after an almost science fiction-like landscape of ancient Bristlecone Pines growing seemingly out of rocks. I was overjoyed that they were still sporting a very nice winter coat. Meanwhile, I was developing a massive headache!



After rounding a bend and seeing a pull-off at around 13,000 feet, I stopped and surveyed the area and saw several goats in the valley a few hundred feet below. I got my gear together and was ready to go on a bit of a hike through the high altitude tundra like landscape when a goat came up over the ridge and started coming right toward me. I had a 300mm f/2.8 lens mounted on my camera and I used the vehicle to stabilize everything to get this and many other shots. I took dozens of shots of several Mountain Goats that day; what makes this my favorite is that it is very dynamic – not only is the front left leg lifted implying movement toward me, the coat is being blown sharply to the left by the strong high altitude winds.

I spent the entire afternoon between 12,500 and 14,200 feet and was feeling worse and worse. It dawned on me that I was suffering from altitude sickness. I had not been above 1500 feet in about 10 years when I took this and never even considered altitude sickness as something to worry about when I went on this hastily planned trip since I spent nearly 100% of my time between

5000 and 12000 feet for about 11 years in the mid 1980's to mid 1990's without a problem; but on this day I went from 1200 feet at my home in the Phoenix area to over 14,000 feet in about 4 hours. Fortunately I was able to “keep it together” until I got to the friendlier elevation of 5300 feet in Denver where my hotel was.

I have photographed Mountain Goats a few other times since in Alaska and South Dakota but these remain my favorite shots.

### **Gear Garage Sale Continues**

I have recently added several new items due to my liquidation of my medium format gear. This includes small items such as Fuji batteries, L-brackets for the GFX-100S and GFX-50S, and more. Additionally, Sony a7R4 support gear is now listed. The headline item now for sale is the fantastic Arca-Swiss Core75 geared leveling tripod head. Many filters and camera support items are still available. All sales are within the USA to USA addresses only. Prices include ground shipping and I am not charging extra to cover PayPal fees – the price you see is what you pay, no hidden fees. Venmo and Zelle are now also accepted and the preferred method of payment. See the full and up to date listing here:

[https://eipphoto.com/gear\\_for\\_sale\\_page.htm](https://eipphoto.com/gear_for_sale_page.htm)



Lands End - Baja California Sur, Mexico

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Deadhorse Ranch State Park - Arizona (GFX100s, 32-64mm)

*E.J. Peiker*  
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