



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

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Welcome to the 20th year of the newsletter from E.J. Peiker, Nature & Travel Photography and www.EJPhoto.com. In this quarterly publication, I share with fellow photographers my photographic experiences, photo equipment reviews, photography tips, processing tips, and industry news. I also inform subscribers about upcoming workshops and products that I offer. 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>



Mobius Milky Way (GFX 50S, 32-64mm)

Miscellaneous Musings

First, let me apologize for this newsletter coming out a bit late this quarter. This is due to having to navigate the healthcare system for my significant other while she was in a Denver lung hospital to get to the bottom of worsening chronic (non-COVID) lung issues. Happily, we are getting to the bottom of her issues.

Second, this newsletter is a bit shorter than usual. As was the case last quarter, I am still unable to publish articles for new products as these products continue to be delayed due to the worldwide supply issues due to supply chain shortages and labor shortages throughout manufacturing processes virtually everywhere on the planet. I am using these products in the field and eagle eyed photographers just might notice although nobody has asked yet either on my outings in Arizona or my recent ones in Colorado.



Garden of the Gods – Colorado (a1, 28-75mm)

The Sony Alpha 1

In the first quarter of this year Sony introduced their spectacularly speeded Sony Alpha 1 (a1) flagship camera. I published a preview of the camera in my Spring letter and will re-use some of the text from it and enhance the information now that I have owned the camera for about two months. I lucked into a body thanks to my friend Greg Downing (Owner of Naturescapes.net) who gave me his delivery slot as he was not yet ready to transition from Nikon having just transitioned from Canon a couple of years ago.

The camera was announced in time for the Tokyo Olympics with the goal of merging and enhancing the capabilities of its previous top of the line action model, the a9 II with its top of the line high resolution model, the a7R IV, while providing the motion picture capabilities of the a7S series into a single, do it all, 50 megapixel model with 8K video capability that does not overheat the camera. Please note that many of the early reviews of this camera both in writing and in YouTube videos have major errors due to the reviewers not knowing how to properly set-up the camera or not taking the time to understand it in the mad rush for clicks. My suggestion is to watch Australian Sony ambassador Mark Galer's videos for definitive information on how to set-up and use Sony cameras and pretty much ignore everyone else when it comes to actual camera set-up and deep understanding. Here's a link to his channel: <https://www.youtube.com/c/AlphaCreativeSkills/videos>

Pros:

1. Solves three of my five biggest issues with Sony cameras – it finally has lossless compressed RAW files, its menus have been revamped to be more user friendly, and menus are now accessible while the images are clearing from the buffer.
2. Motion picture like frame rate of 30 FPS while capturing 50 megapixel images with most Sony lenses (as long as continuous AF is set to Release mode and compressed RAW is selected) and still very high frame rates of 15 to 20 frames per second with older Sony lenses and most third party lenses.
3. 50 megapixel full frame files and 22 megapixel APS-C (Super 35) files with better high ISO noise characteristics than the a7R4 producing exceptional dynamic range – 15 stops of engineering dynamic range or about 13 stops of real world photography dynamic range.
4. Exceptional autofocus including a new bird eye AF mode that tracks an eye if it can and the AI understands what a bird is and will focus on that if it cannot track an eye. Note that this function has been vastly improved in the latest firmware update – it's just insanely good and now the best of any camera on the market. Simply point the camera towards the subject and the AF point will automatically jump to the subject's eye instantaneously – it doesn't matter where the actual AF point position is. It is so good that it works from inside your house to outside through a window and it works when the bird is really small in the frame - it just works!
5. Rolling shutter has been largely eliminated allowing fully electronic shutter even in action photography without the strange distortion one can get on slower scanning cameras.
6. The adoption of CFexpress (Type A) cards for much faster write and read times and much faster buffer clearing than SD cards. Both slots are full speed and will take either CFexpress or SD cards.
7. A super high resolution 9.4 million dot EVF that is getting closer to optical viewfinder quality with a very high refresh rate that essentially eliminates lag time. It has nearly double the resolution EVF compared to any other camera on the market at the time of release and 3x the resolution of the majority of cameras on the market. The EVF has an incredible 0.9x magnification which will give you a perceived viewfinder image that is almost as large as most medium format cameras.
8. The a1 steps-up flash sync speeds to 1/400 sec with mechanical shutter and for the first time allows flash sync in fully electronic shutter mode at 1/200 sec.
9. Sony cameras have had a reputation of not being very resistant to sensor dirt since the sensor is totally exposed during lens changes. The a1 has solved this, following Canon's lead of closing the shutter whenever the camera is off thereby making it easy to change lenses without getting dirt on the sensor.
10. For those that want to shoot high resolution video, this camera shoots 8K video without the overheating that other small bodied cameras suffer from.



Echo Lake – Colorado (a1 – 70-180mm)

Cons:

1. The price, at \$6500 this is a serious investment for a do it all camera.
2. The rear LCD is low resolution by 2021 standards at 1.44 million dots, which, for this caliber of camera and price point is very much sub-par. It is still just the simple flip up/flip down type screen that does not articulate up and down when shooting verticals. It is strange that the EVF would be the highest resolution one in the industry but the rear LCD is the lowest of cameras introduced in the last couple of years.
3. Pixel-shift, while an interesting feature that allows you to take 200 megapixel photos is still essentially unusable on anything but an absolute zero movement of anything situation. If you aren't on a concrete slab indoors with zero airflow using a heavy tripod and a completely, and I mean absolutely 100% motionless subject, it will give you weird uncorrectable artifacts. There are others (mainly Olympus) that have actually figured out how to correct for this movement in minor motion situations.
4. One of the features still missing from the Sony feature set that is automated focus stacking (sometimes called focus bracketing) – Sony is now the only company that does not offer this in its higher end products.
5. Another missing feature that I loved about the Nikon cameras like the D850 is various aspect ratios in RAW. Sony just gives you APS-C which is the same aspect ratio as full frame and 16x9. I really like being able to shoot a square or a 4x5 and have the RAW files write out that way. This isn't a huge deal but something that Sony cameras lack compared to some competitor's cameras.
6. Slower maximum frame rates with third party lenses and some older Sony lenses, but the slowest is still 15 FPS so it really isn't an issue.
7. Not expressly a shortcoming of the a1, but rather of the infrastructure around the a1, is that the only company shipping CFexpress Type A cards at the time of this writing is Sony. As such they are insanely expensive. Prices of these cards will come down substantially as competition comes

into the market but several have announced and then delayed introduction of the cards due to the worldwide semiconductor shortage. Fortunately the camera is a capable performer even with SD cards.

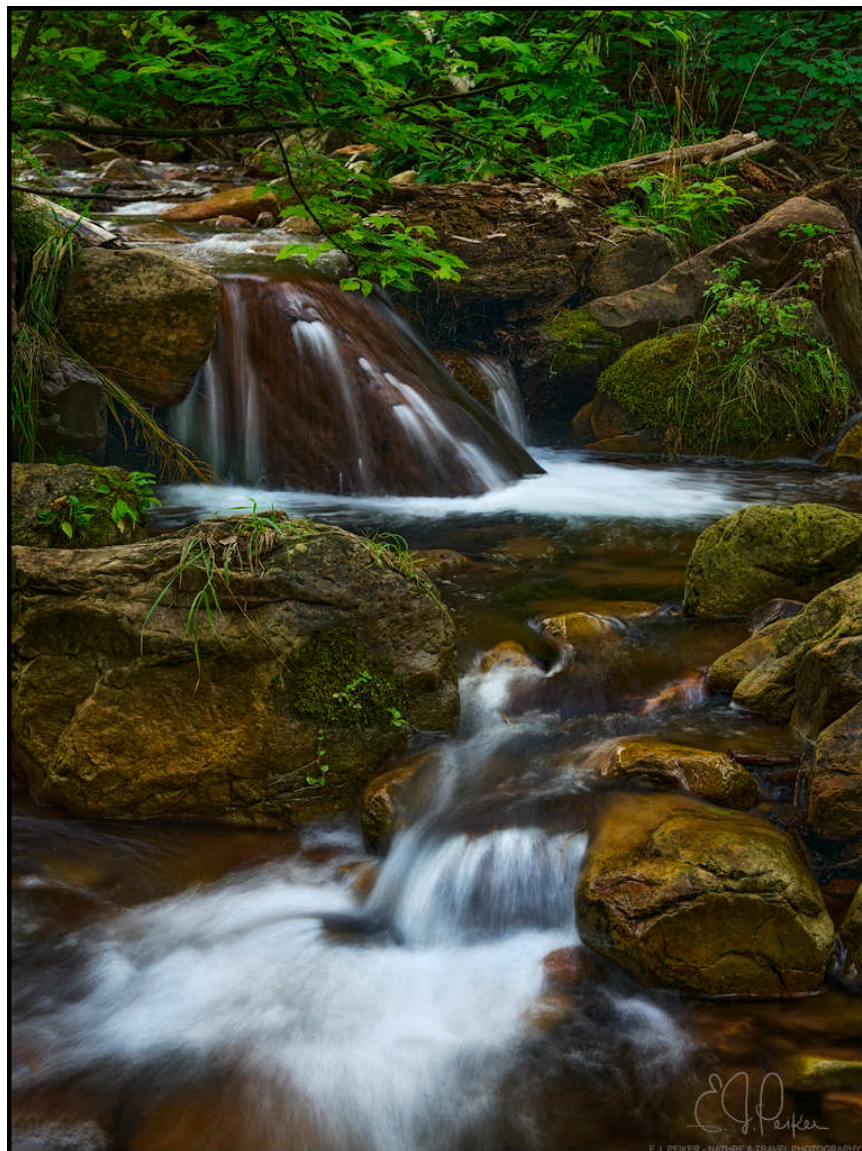
8. Sony still does not allow you to save everything you might want to into its custom shooting dial positions. For example, on every camera I own, I set Custom 1 for landscape photography and Custom 2 for wildlife photography I use back-button focus in landscape photography but, given eye AF, prefer the AF on the shutter button for wildlife. The camera does not allow you to save this in the custom shooting settings. You have to go to a menu to change it. Similarly, for landscape I like auto-review on but this clearly needs to be off in a wildlife shooting situation where you want to track the subject as you are shooting. Finally, since the drive mode is now on a dial rather than on a button, one has to physically change the drive mode rather than having it auto switch when changing the custom mode setting. So as an example, if I have been shooting landscapes and want to quickly switch to wildlife I have to do the following: 1. Change from Custom mode 1 to Custom Mode2, change from back-button focus to shutter button focus via My Menu, change the drive mode dial position from single shot or self-timer to continuous, and change from auto-review on to auto-review off. This is annoying and is more burdensome than it was on the a7R4 as that was only three steps.

The Alpha 1 or a1 is a very serious, ultra high end full frame mirrorless camera with relatively few compromises. It is the only camera on the market, in my view, that is optimized for action, wildlife, studio, and landscape photography simultaneously. It is a single camera that really can do it all (as long as you don't need rapid focus stacking). At the time of this writing, it is easily the most advanced camera on the market.



Steller's Jay (a1, 200-600mm)

The Story Behind The Photo



While this quarter's "Story Behind the Photo" selection is far from one of my best photos, it represents a milestone of sorts. One year ago to the day that this photo was taken, I had a harrowing hiking experience in Utah's Grand Staircase Escalante that I chronicled in the "Story Behind the Photo" in last Autumn's newsletter: <https://ejphoto.com/Quack%20PDF/Quack%20Autumn%202020.pdf> (see Page 9). About a month after taking that photograph and feeling that I had almost put myself in a situation that could have killed me; I had a huge bike crash which put me out of commission for many months. Now let's back-up two years from that incident – I became aware of a hike in Arizona's Mogollan Rim country that meandered through the woods paralleling a creek that is fed by a Spring. I saw a number of very nice photographs taken along this 4 mile in/4 mile out route that also gains about 1500 feet in elevation. I made plans to do this hike and photograph along the creek but the conditions had to be right. These include an overcast morning but without the threat of thunderstorms (rare in this part of AZ – it's either clear or if not, it's a monsoonal storm), temperatures that were not too extreme, after significant rainfall so that water would be running at a healthy clip, a weekday not a weekend to avoid crowds, and it had to occur between April 1 and November 1 as the area is closed for Winter outside of those dates and the

trail is unhikeable. These things all have to happen simultaneously and generally only happen, at best, one or two days a year. They did not occur at all in 2018, 2019, and while they did occur in 2020 for two days, both were while I was just two weeks out of the hospital after my bike crash and still unable to even go to the bathroom without help.

Finally, on the last day of August in 2021, the conditions all came together but I had to thread the needle between overnight rainfall, a complete clearing by 8:00AM and then thunderstorms in the afternoon. Overcast conditions are needed for this type of photography since I wanted to avoid dappled light ruining the shots. I have always found waterfall photography to be at its best on cloudy days. This meant that I had to leave on the two hour drive to the trailhead at 3:00AM to get there by 5:00AM and hit the trail an hour before the 6:00AM sunrise. I wasn't sure how well my untried hip would hold up hiking this far with this much elevation gain, while carrying a 22 pound backpack. This was the first serious hike since my injuries and I was going to have to do a lot of it in the dark since I was hoping to get to the far end of the trail by 6:30AM and then photograph my way back down the trail and get done around the time of the forecasted clearing resulting in harsh dappled light in the woods.

For once, everything worked out pretty much as planned other than taking a couple of errant off-shoots from the main trail in the darkish conditions but, having learned my lessons from my Utah experience, I was tracking my progress via GPS, had enough water, had a Lifestraw, and had food. I was a little disappointed that there wasn't more water running and, therefore, did not make any of the really phenomenal photos that I have seen from the area (most taken 10-15 years ago before a decade long drought) but I did get a few nice shots including the one pictured here. I made it back to my car right around 8:45AM and while I was tired, everything went well and my hip felt reasonably well. I treated myself to an extra large Iced Latte in Payson, AZ and stopped by Amy's house for a bagel with cream cheese and strawberries on the way home. The next morning was a different story as far as how my hip felt as I was very achy, sore, and stiff but I expected this. As they say – it hurts so good.



Alpine Peak & Griffith Mountain – Colorado (a1, 28-75mm)

The Best Lenses for Your Nikon, Canon and Sony Mirrorless Cameras

The table of best lenses for your camera is a living document that gets updated every quarter. Changes from previous tables can be seen in **bold** but there are no changes this time because none of the new lenses that would likely make this list are actually available. As development of DSLR lenses for Nikon and Canon have essentially stopped, I am switching this section to covering mirrorless only. On all systems, areas left blank means that there is no lens currently available (or there isn't one that I can recommend – e.g. the Canon 600/800mm f/11 lenses) with that native mount; however, in virtually all cases, a DSLR lens can be adapted to the mirrorless system often with some minor to moderate compromises, primarily in autofocus capability. Currently there are no electronically coupled third party lenses for the Canon and Nikon mirrorless systems due to both manufacturers using a proprietary mount strategy. For my final DSLR lens recommendations for Canon and Nikon, please see the Autumn 2020 Newsletter linked here: <https://ejphoto.com/Quack%20PDF/Quack%20Autumn%202020.pdf>

Lens Category	Canon RF Mount	Nikon Z Mount	Sony (F)E Mount
Full-frame Fisheye			Sony 28mm f/2 + 16mm Fisheye Conversion Lens
Hyper Wide Prime			Sony 14mm f/2.8 GM Sigma 14mm f/1.8 Art
Ultra Wide Prime		Nikkor Z 20mm f/1.8S	Zeiss Batis 18mm f/2.8 Voigtlander 15mm f/4.5
Extra Wide Prime		Nikkor Z 24mm f/1.8S	Sony 20mm f/1.8 G Zeiss Loxia 21mm f/2.8
Standard Wide Prime			Sony 24mm f/1.4 GM Sigma 24mm f/1.4 Art
Moderate Wide Prime		Nikkor Z 35mm f/1.8S	Sigma 35mm f/1.2 Art Sony-Zeiss 35mm f/1.4
Standard Prime	Canon RF 50mm f/1.2L Canon RF 50mm f/1.8	Nikkor Z 50mm f/1.2S Nikkor Z 50mm f/1.8S	Sony 50mm f/1.2 GM Sony-Zeiss 55mm f/1.8
Portrait Prime (short telephoto)	Canon RF 85mm f/1.2L Canon RF 85mm f/2 Macro IS	Nikkor Z 85mm f/1.8S	Sigma 85mm f/1.4 DG DN Sigma 105mm f/1.4 Art Sony 85mm f/1.4 GM
Medium Telephoto Prime			Sigma 135mm f/1.8 Art Sony 135mm f/1.8 GM Zeiss Batis 135mm f/2.8
200mm Prime			
300mm Prime			
400mm Prime	Canon RF 400mm f/2.8L IS		Sony 400mm f/2.8 GM
500mm Prime			
600mm Prime	Canon RF 600mm f/4L IS		Sony 600mm f/4 GM
800mm Prime			
Wide Angle Zoom	Canon RF 15-35mm f/2.8L	Nikkor Z 14-24mm f/2.8S Nikkor Z 14-30mm f/4S	Sony 16-35mm f/2.8 GM Sony 12-24mm f/2.8 GM Sigma 14-24 f/2.8 Art Tamron 17-28 f/2.8 Di
Standard Zoom	Canon 28-70mm f/2L Canon 24-80 f/2.8L Canon RF 24-105mm f/4L IS	Nikkor Z 24-70 f/2.8S Nikkor Z 24-70 f/4S	Sigma 24-70 f/2.8 Art Sony 24-70 f/2.8 GM Tamron 28-75mm f/2.8
Telephoto Zoom	Canon RF 70-200 f/2.8L IS	Nikkor Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR	Tamron 70-180mm f/2.8 Sony 70-200 f/2.8 GM
Super Telephoto Zoom	Canon RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1		Sony 100-400 f/4.5-5.6 GM Sony 200-600 f/5.6-6.3 G
Macro	Canon RF 100mm f/2.8L Macro IS	Nikkor Z MC 105mm VR S	Sigma 105mm f/2.8 Macro Art Sony 90mm f/2.8 Macro Voigtlander 110mm f/2.5

Gear Garage Sale Continues

Thank you to the great response to my gear sale. I have sold a lot of high quality items in the last quarter including some essentially new stuff. Many filters and camera support items are still available and I will be adding a Fuji GFX 50S medium format camera with spare battery soon (send me an email at ejpeiker@cox.net if interested before I actually list it). 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 is now also accepted. See the full and up to date listing here: https://ejphoto.com/gear_for_sale_page.htm

Workshops

I currently have no group workshops planned until the COVID-19 pandemic is behind us. Private instruction in camera operation, landscape and wildlife photography is available as well as image processing training in Capture One, Topaz, Nik, and Photoshop. Photo workstation consulting services are available. These services are currently only available via telephone or video conference. Contact me at ejpeiker@cox.net for more information.

Facebook and Instagram Pages

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/ejpeiker/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/EJPeikerNaturePhotographer>

Newsletter Info

This is the 20th year of my quarterly Newsletter. I try to cover the wide array of digital imaging and products from mirrorless to medium format and everything in between. Throughout the years, the information contained herein has always been free and will continue to be free despite the many hours it takes to put it together and significant equipment and travel expenses. Most of the products that I have tested and reviewed, I have purchased myself. A small minority have been made available to me for review and evaluation by loyal readers and a few by the manufacturers themselves. While the newsletter is free either via eMail subscription or via accessing it on my website at <http://www.ejphoto.com/newsletter.htm>, if you find the information useful to you and you do wish to donate for my continuing efforts, you may do so via PayPal and sending the funds to ejpeiker@cox.net.

Disclaimers

E.J. Peiker conducts consulting services and product design services for a number of photographic product companies. Those that know me know that I would not endorse a product, even for compensation, if I did not feel it were a superior product.

E.J. Peiker is a co-founder of www.Naturescapes.net and leads photographic workshops under the **NatureScapes** Certified Workshops banner.

E.J. Peiker is a member of **Fujifilm** Professional Services and receives some services at a substantial discount or free of charge from Nikon USA. www.fujifilm-x.com/en-us/fps/

E.J. Peiker is a **Sony** Digital Imaging Pro and receives some services at a reduced cost or free of charge from Sony USA. <https://alphauniverse.com/prosupport/>

E.J. Peiker promotes **LensCoat** products and receives some of their products at no cost. www.lenscoat.com

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