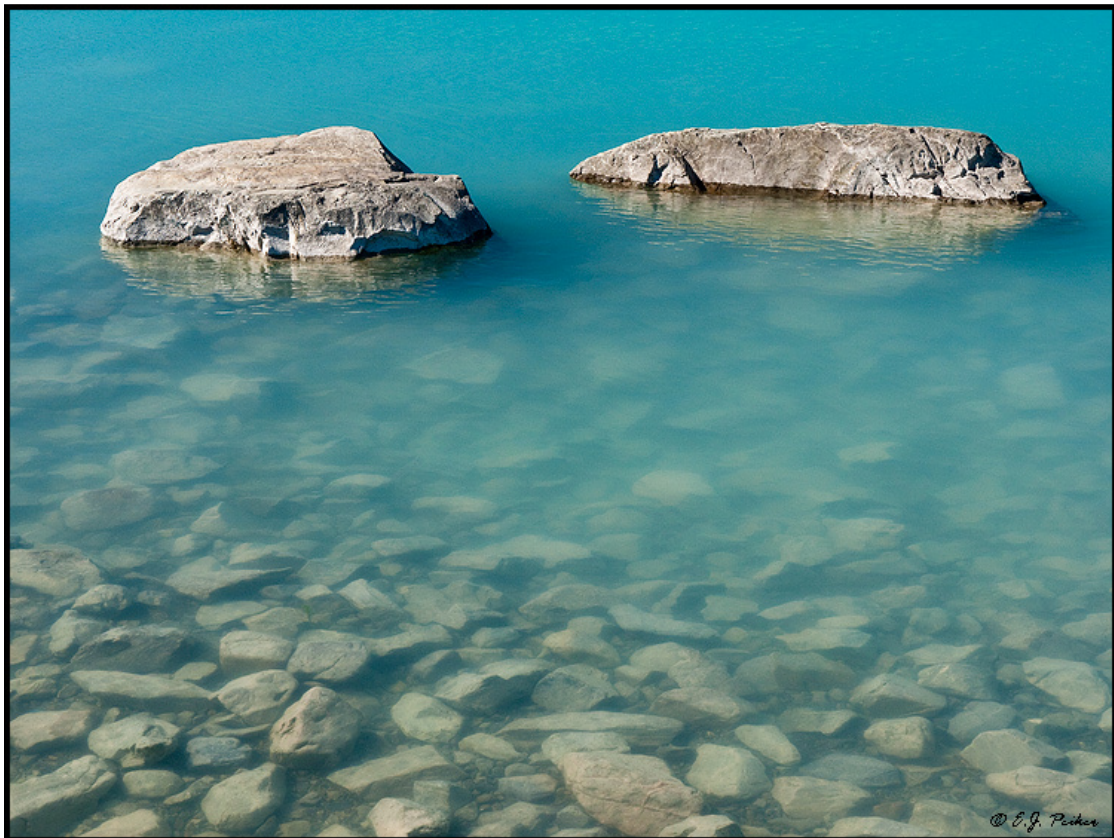


QUACK

Newsletter of E.J. Peiker, Nature Photographer and www.EJPhoto.com
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Welcome to the quarterly newsletter from E.J. Peiker Nature Photography and www.EJPhoto.com. In this quarterly email publication, I will keep subscribers posted on upcoming workshops including the DuckShop Workshop Series as well as sharing some photos and experiences with you. I will also give you brief impressions on any new equipment that I get the opportunity to use and any other general information in the world of digital nature photography. Please feel free to forward this along to other photographers and interested parties but please do so only by forwarding this newsletter in its entirety. Note that all content is copyrighted by E.J. Peiker. If you would like to be added or deleted to the mailing list, just send me an email message at ejpeiker@cox.net. Back issues are available online at <http://www.ejphoto.com/newsletter.htm>



Lake Tekapo - New Zealand (GF1, 14-45mm)

We Need Lighter Gear

In a world of ever increasing airline regulations regarding baggage, ever increasing restrictions in how much can be brought on board, traveling photographers, hikers and professional photographers need exceptional quality lighter weight gear. In a world of super strong, lightweight materials such as Carbon Fiber and Kevlar, isn't it time the camera manufacturers made uncompromised lighter weight professional cameras and lenses?

The "landscape" for the photographer that travels has changed dramatically in the last 10 years in the wake of terror threats and continuing profitability issues and poor business management by airlines. Air carriers are continuing to make it more and more difficult to get a camera and lens kit, sometimes worth as much as \$30,000 on board. While the restrictions in the USA are still relatively mild compared to the rest of the world, many foreign carriers now have weight restrictions for what you can bring on board as low as 5kg but 7-10kg is more typical. You simply can't get your expensive gear on board if this is enforced. As a result we either have to smooth talk our way on the plane with the gear, or trust that the baggage handling system or the people running it won't damage or "lose" your expensive gear.



Desert Wildflower Bloom - Bartlett Lake, Arizona

Additionally, a very high percentage of successful professional landscape and wildlife photographers are in their middle ages or beyond. Years of carrying heavy gear is taking a toll on their bodies and often knocking them out of the game while they are at their creative best. I often hike miles with my gear and at times have actually foregone as much water as I should take to make sure I can carry all the gear.

It is high time the camera manufacturers responded to this with professional level photo gear that weighs much less than it currently does. Does a pro body like the D3x really need to weigh almost 3lb before you even add a lens to it? Add a large telephoto lens, and support system and often the rig alone will top 20lb. Adding accessories easily takes you over 30lb. Does a professional 24-70mm zoom lens really need to weigh 2lb? When

one pays \$5000 for a D3 or EOS 1D Mark IV or as much as \$8000 for Nikon and Canon's high end cameras, do they really need to be made out of magnesium or could something that is as strong or stronger but weighs dramatically less, like Carbon Fiber, be used?

Landscape photographers almost never use their professional lenses at f/2 or f/2.8 and often carry their gear for miles. How about a complete line of professional grade f/4 lenses? Each one would weigh half of what an equivalent f/2.8 lens weighs. Canon has made some excellent inroads in this regard but unfortunately their f/4 line of pro lenses simply is not as good optically as the larger heavier f/2.8 line of pro grade lenses. There is no technical reason why an f/4 lens shouldn't be as sharp or sharper than an f/2.8 lens. Nikon is way behind in lighter smaller aperture pro lenses and just recently introduced the first real entry into this field with the 16-35 f/4 but they chose to add weight to the lens by adding VR to a lens that simply does not need it. There are still no other f/4 pro grade lenses in the Nikon lineup. The manufacturers have not gone far enough in this regard. Just making a smaller aperture lens doesn't really fully deal with the problem. It's time these lenses also incorporated stronger lighter weight materials into their barrels reducing the weight of lenses even further..



Pied Shag - New Zealand (D300, 500mm, 1.4x)

Nikon Teleconverter Evaluation

In February, Nikon started shipping a completely revised 2x Teleconverter - the TC-20EIII. This new TC replaces the much maligned, and positively awful TC-20EII and includes some exotic coatings to produce a more contrasty and sharper image along with a totally revamped optical design. Bird and Wildlife photographers use TC's fairly regularly to get the extra reach needed to fill the frame with small or distant subjects. I was one of the first in the US to get one of these new units and immediately put it to an extensive test. I compared it's performance to other current Nikon Teleconverters and the TC-20EII that it replaces. My summary findings are that the new TC-20E-III is a significant improvement of the TC-20E II but it does not match the performance of the TC-14E II or the TC-17E II.

For this test I set up a resolution target at 50 feet for the TC-20E II/III, with 500 f/4 VR lens,

and D300 body illuminated by flash to remove camera shake from the equation. After quite a bit of thought on how to deal with the difference in subject magnification with the different teleconverters, I decided that I would move the camera closer with the smaller converters to maintain equal image size of the target. I shot the test samples at ISO 200 in RAW and then converted the files with equivalent settings in Adobe Camera Raw (ACR) with all sharpening turned off. I checked the converter for focus calibration using the moiré pattern interference method (http://www.northlight-images.co.uk/article_pages/cameras/1ds3_af_micoadjustment.html) and found that no adjustment was needed. I used the D300 because this is the body I would use a TC with 95% of the time.

Below are the results in order from highest resolution to lowest resolution. I have grouped the combinations into 7 categories based on image sharpness. Combinations within a group are very close but are still ranked in order from best to worst even within that group:

Outstanding image quality:

1. 1.4x @ f/11

Excellent image quality

2. 1.4x @ f/8
3. 1.4x @ f/16

Very Good image quality:

4. 1.7x @ f/16
5. 1.7x @ f/11

Average Image quality:

6. 2.0xIII @ f/16
7. 1.7x @ f/8

Below Average image quality:

8. 1.4x @ f/5.6
9. 1.7x @ f/6.7
10. 2x III @ f/11

Poor image quality:

11. 2x III @ f/8

Atrocious image quality:

12. 2x II @ f/16
13. 2xII @ f/11
14. 2xII @ f/8

Note that the lens without any teleconverter beats all combination that use a teleconverter at any aperture. The older TC-20E II is



Usery Mountains,- Arizona (EOS 1Ds Mark II, 16-35mm)

significantly worse than any other combination at any aperture. I simply do not think the older Nikon TC-20E II is a viable teleconverter for those wishing good sharp results. It isn't even worth mounting on a camera given the other alternatives including the new TC-20E III or simply using the 1.7x and cropping.

The TC-20EIII wide open should be considered emergency use only and you would almost always do better by upping the ISO over shooting it at maximum aperture.

The first three groups certainly give more than acceptable image quality in tightly controlled situations and with good long lens technique. However, in my experience, great care and high precision is required to get laser sharp results anytime you use the 1.7x or 2x especially at infinity focus. On a higher megapixel camera, you may be better off cropping to get the image size rather than using a TC. This, however, will be very subjective and each photographer will have to determine at what point it is simply better for him/her to crop rather than use a bigger TC. Another conclusion that is evident, as expected, is that shooting with a TC wide open is always the worst that the TC/lens combination can produce. Again it may just be better to up the ISO and live with a touch more noise than shooting wide open with a TC attached.

Finally, autofocus worked fine even with the 2x, certainly there was a slowdown compared to not using a TC but the AF was perfectly useable even in fairly low light as long as there is adequate contrast.

Revisiting Old Photos

Almost every time I go through an older folder of images I find some gems that I missed before or see something in the photos that today's photo tools can turn into an excellent image. Our RAW converters, filter packs like Nik ColorEffex Pro and other tools of the digital darkroom can really bring forth what your mind's eye saw when you were taking the photo. Tools in the past or your skill level in the past might not have been able to get the most out of that photo. Revisiting some of your old files might just turn up a masterpiece.

Below is a photo of Oxbow bend taken with the original Canon EOS 1Ds camera (11 megapixel) and a 24-70mm f/2.8 lens in 2003. The RAW conversion was done with the best tool available for the job at the time - Chris Breeze's BreezeBrowser. While BreezeBrowser is still the best fast browsing and culling tool for the PC Platform even today, it doesn't hold a candle to modern tools like Adobe Camera RAW or Capture One or even Canon's own Digital Photo Professional. Additionally, filter sets like Nik Color Efex Pro was not available then to really bring out and enhance all of the information in the photo. The second photo below is the same RAW file processed in the latest version of Adobe Camera RAW with it's incredible capabilities. The photo then had Nik's polarizer applied. While they are clearly the same photograph, the final processed outcome of the two is quite different with the new one taking on much better clarity, color and much more accurately representing what my eyes and brain interpreted and remembers of the scene that day. Back then, I didn't have the ability to use layer masking in post processing like I do now nor did Photoshop possess the ability to process layers and most functions in 16 bit per color mode. All of these make a big difference in the outcome.

So if you are sitting at home on a rainy weekend, maybe looking at some old photos through the eyes of the newer tools and your improved skills might put a smile on your face.



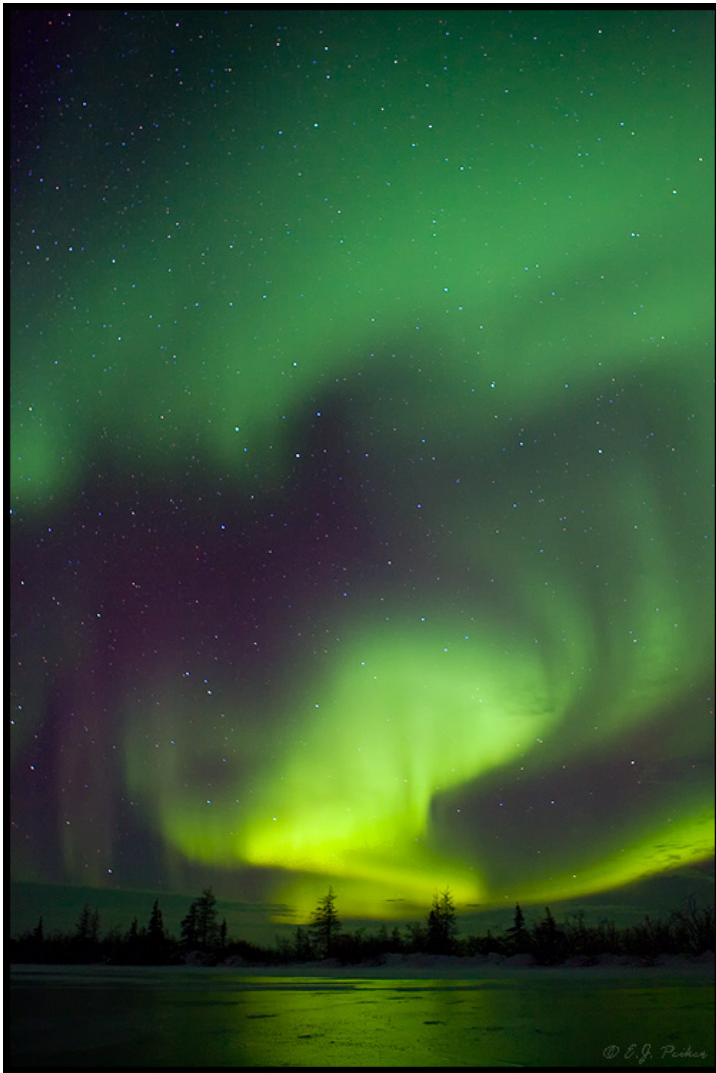
Mount Moran at Oxbow Bend- original version (EOS 1Ds, 24-70mm)



Mount Moran at Oxbow Bend- new version (EOS 1Ds, 24-70mm)

Cool New Gear

Spring always tends to be a time when the manufacturers announce new products. There are several key shows that provide the backdrop for these announcements including the Photo Marketing Association's annual show (PMA) and the Consumer Electronics Show (CES), along with a number of shows abroad. This year is no exception and there are three products that are exciting to me from this year's spring announcements.



Aurora Borealis, Manitoba (EOS 1D Mark II, 24-70mm)

First and foremost, Pentax's entry into the medium format DSLR has produced, which on paper, looks like the best MF body for the landscape photographer yet. It is a fully weather sealed, integrated DSLR that uses the advanced technologies that we have come to expect in 35mm format DSLRs and marries that with Kodak's acclaimed 44x33mm 40 megapixel sensor with full 16 bit per color capture and a conservative dynamic range spec of 11.5 megapixels. Pentax also introduced a new 50mm lens with the body with more to come and it is compatible with all previous Pentax medium format lenses. Some of these are excellent lenses. And to top it all off, the price point is under \$10K which is unheard of in this level of camera. They are able to accomplish this by using technologies from their smaller form factor DSLR offerings. This is all very exciting but there's one catch! For now Pentax is only selling this camera in Japan as it feels the Pentax support network required for this level of professional gear is simply not in place outside of Japan. I do hope they fix that and make this camera available in North America and other places soon.

Nikon has introduced a very exciting lens for the low light photographer. A 24mm f/1.4 pro lens is beginning to ship as I type this. This seems like the ultimate night landscape lens to me and would be phenomenal for aurora photography. I want one of these but at \$2200 it is very expensive and I will definitely wait to see some extensive tests on this lens before taking the plunge.

Finally, I am also excited by Nikon's entry into the f/4 pro zoom market with the 16-35 f/4 VR. Early reports on this lens have however been mixed and I still don't think a lens this wide needs vibration reduction as it adds weight, complexity, and usually compromises the optical quality at least somewhat on wide lenses. But I am thrilled that Nikon has finally woken up to the fact that pros need lighter weight gear - see the first article in this quarter's newsletter!

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 a number of galleries accessible through there. Please visit: www.facebook.com/pages/EJ-Peiker-Nature-Photographer/150804446733 and if you like what you see, you may choose to become a fan of the page.

Private Photography Instruction

In addition to the successful private DuckShops which I launched last winter after many years of group instruction workshops, I am now also offering private instruction in Wildlife and Landscape photography at the place of your choosing within the USA and Canada. All DuckShops and private Workshops will be 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: http://www.ejphoto.com/duckshop_private.htm

NatureScapes Radio Podcast

Greg Downing and I, two of the original three founders of NatureScapes.net, are now doing a monthly podcast. The podcast is chock-full of information about nature photography, traveling with gear, new equipment, and even computing as it relates to photography. We cover a wide range of subjects and answer listener's questions. The podcast is every first Tuesday of the month. You can go to NatureScapes.net (<http://www.naturescapes.net/docs/index.php/naturescapes-radio-live-podcast>) to listen live or download the latest episode or simply go to iTunes and type NatureScapes live radio into the search box and download episodes.

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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.

Notice:

EJPhoto will be closed June 11 - June 22, 2010. All orders and inquiries will be processed in the order in which they were received beginning June 23, 2010.

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African Elephant Baby - Serengeti, Tanzania (EOS 20D, 500mm)