

## Simplification

By Bill Black

A few months ago I addressed the issue of minimizing the amount of photograph equipment to take on extended trips, especially ones involving commercial travel. Now, as an extension of that, let's branch out those ideas to an exercise in extreme simplification.

We photographers, as a group, tend to be very equipment-oriented people. Each new piece of gear gives birth to the need of additional accessories. Before you know it your camera bag will barely close and you'll be looking for new ways to strap more items to your body. After spending substantial sums of money on quality photographic equipment, it sometimes becomes very difficult for the photographer to leave anything at home when going on an outdoor photo expedition, whether it be for a couple of hours or several weeks. After all, what could be a worse feeling than a perfect photo opportunity missed because the lens or filter for the job is sitting at home on a shelf? Some time ago I found that I tended to lose more quality shots than I gained by carrying too much equipment.

Weight is a major concern in outdoor photography. Photo apparatus can be quite heavy, hampering your mobility and endurance. Many times, especially in nature photography, a long walk is necessary to reach an area of suitable subjects. I for one would hate the thought of losing a potentially great photograph simply because I was too tired to venture on from carrying a batch of equipment I had little probability of using in the first place.

Aside from the physical demands of carrying a lot is the much more important mental aspect. A "ton" of photo gear can weigh heavily on the creative instinct. It has been my experience that an excess of equipment creates an excess of possibilities! Which subjects? Which lenses? What filters? All this, combined with a limited time to catch my favorite early morning or late afternoon light keeps me hopping from one subject to another where it seems that I spend more time changing lenses and accessories than photographing.

***Photography is the art of isolating a small section from a large scene in such a way as to make the smaller scene a valid point of interest in its own right.***

In order to do this, one must mentally focus on the subject at hand. By slowing down and simplifying the photographic process, you can increase your overall productivity. With only one or two lenses at your disposal, rather than an entire arsenal, you must become more creative in your approach to capturing your subject on film. That is what quality over quantity is all about.

Try this experiment: Find an area relatively close to home that you may have visited even if you have extensively photographed it. Examples might be Hurricane Ridge, the Dungeness Spit, Ruby and Rialto beaches, the Hoh Rain Forest, and Port Townsend. Rather than taking along a whole bag full of items, **take just one lens** and maybe a couple of filters. Focus your attention solely on finding subjects that are conducive to the tools you have at hand. Try things you might not normally have taken the time to try. You might be impressed with the results.

When visiting a remote spot far from home or taking a once-in-a-lifetime trip, it might be necessary to carry more equipment. Even in these instances it is wise to balance your gear against your actual needs. Do some research on your destination so that you will go prepared with the correct tools?

Oh, yes, while out for a photo shoot, have you ever dropped a lens? What do you do now? Panic? Is the trip ruined? How will you manage now that your favorite lens lies on the ground? If you are lucky you have another lens available. Maybe it's a wide angle, a normal, or a short zoom, and the remainder of your trip must be photographed with just this one lens. Talk about forced creativity!

Anyway, unloading yourself of unnecessary or excessive accessories might not always provide you with the ability to handle every conceivable possibility. It will, however, enable you to make the most of the equipment you are carrying. More important, it will help you take advantage of the greatest creative tool you have, and that's the one in your head.