

Tripod or Not?

By Brian Schroder

(Originally addressed to Jim Martin via e-mail, but edited for this newsletter)

Jim, when I saw you the other day out to get some images, you were carrying a tripod, one of which I use less and less these days, so I wrote this article for the club about them.

When we go out to make our photographs, most of us use our tripods to steady our equipment, yet none of us like having to pack them along. I don't believe, however, that as we do this all of us understand the total implication of using or not using that three-legged monster. And I am included. We take for granted the real benefits and impacts of this practice. Most of us use either 35mm film or digital SLRs.. Even with the sensor of the digital SLR at full size, there is a disadvantage. This disadvantage is trying to fit the massive amount of information of a scene into that small area of the digital sensor (or the viewfinder of a film SLR). This is for both the photographer and the equipment. The room for error is significant because our scope of vision using the digital sensor and the viewfinder are limited compared to that of our eyes. Our eyes are about 150 times better at compensating for light changes; our own built-in "f-stops" allow us to think we can overcome these obstacles. We get what I call *Photographer Override Program Mode*.

That being said, I know that many of us have our own techniques or excuses for not using the tripods all the time. Technologies of our day are changing all the time, for example the advent of new vibration reduction lenses. I own one of these beauties, and they are very seductive and addictive to use without the tripod and in the *Photographer Override Program Mode*. The vibration reduction lens has its merits; for one they can be used handheld to allow lower shutter speeds than normal to get acceptable images in lower light and other conditions not readily achievable before.

Remember, I said acceptable, not great or very sharp under close inspection of big enlargements. Under this inspection the *Photographer Override Program Mode* falls apart, and quality goes by the way side. If we all don't think in the terms of starting with this disadvantage or treat it as such when we are using our best equipment and optics outdoors, we are throwing our money away by not using the three-legged monster. To get the best results from our investment and enjoyment of our time, we can't settle for just acceptable. This is a gentle reminder, to all of us including me trying to get our visions onto film or a digital memory card, that using the three-legged monster will always enhance, not detract from our final product.