

## Tips for a Digital Photo Adventure

by Photographer Raymond Klass

Our biggest concern when embarking on a photo adventure used to be whether the airport security guard would allow our film to hand-checked or not. While most of us are no longer concerned about film, travel hasn't gotten any easier with our digital cameras, laptops, cards, chargers, and seemingly endless supply of accessories. That's one of the reasons, when I thought about my trip this summer that I decided to drive.

My plan was to take a trip around the United States, and into a bit of Canada, camping along the way at National, State, and Provincial Parks. Flying was out of the question for several reasons. First, with the summer of 2008 fuel price surge, I couldn't afford flights and rental cars to connect the various legs of my trip, and secondly, I couldn't take enough supplies with me on an airplane. There was just no way to pack camping gear for the cold autumn temperatures of the high peaks of Canada, and clothing for the canyons and deserts of Utah and California.

So driving did solve my issue with space, but camping at the parks created other concerns. With my digital camera, laptop, external hard drives and various batteries, I was a bit concerned where I would charge them all, as I would be camping without electricity. I purchased a DC inverter from my local electronics store. This simple and fairly inexpensive device plugs into your automobile cigarette lighter port, and provides a standard outlet. With the key in the ignition, you can run devices off your car's battery, or with the car running, the engine both charges the battery and runs your device.



During my trip, which lasted 100 days – from June 18th until September 25<sup>th</sup> – I was constantly charging devices. I would plug my cell phone, camera batteries, laptop etc., while I drove from location to location so as to keep up with all the devices that kept running out of battery charge. It was a bit hectic in the beginning, but after a couple of weeks, I got into the groove of turning on the car, and plugging something in.



Traveling about 20,000 miles, and stopping at dozens of parks, I would try and be out shooting when the light was best. I spent afternoons when the light wasn't good, downloading and backing up the images. Shooting a bit over 23,000 images, I had a small challenge in finding space for all the files. I chose not to edit my images in the field, as I find that I'm a much more objective editor when I'm not still in the moment of the shoot. I tend to look at the images more critically, and often it was too difficult to see my laptop screen in the afternoon sun to make any decision about my images. So, there I was with 600+ gigabytes of files, and a hard drive that would only hold 30 gigabytes. I purchased external hard drives to make up the difference. Loading the images onto two hard drives – one a copy of the other, provided me with some security in case one failed during the trip.

When I returned home, I began also burning DVDs of the images as another form of backup – something I would not have had time to do in the field. It is important to make sure you have your images backed up in at least two places – and preferably the two places should be located in two different physical locations, like your home and your office, or a family members house.

I knew before I began the trip that I would be in some of the more extreme environments we have in the US. I planned to visit Death Valley NP in the middle of July, and also planned to hike some of the taller peaks and passes – like 10,000+ foot Paintbrush Pass in the Tetons. I was a bit concerned about all my digital equipment in the 127 degrees of Death Valley; the constant rains of the Washington and Oregon coasts, and the cold





of the high elevations. To combat the temperature extremes I brought a cooler, and placed my laptop and hard drives in it, inside my trunk to give a buffer to the temperatures. In terms of the rain, I didn't have much choice but to be as careful as possible, and try to keep one dry towel in my car – my tent was soaked for a couple weeks straight.

Another challenge was backpacking into the backcountry with all this digital equipment. I used to use hard drives you can plug the card into directly to download in the field, and have had success backpacking with those. For this trip, because the distances were often long – 20 miles per day or more, I decided they would be too heavy. Instead, I bought several 8GB compact flash cards, enough for 3-4 days, and decided just to use the cards. This cut about 3lbs out of my backpack, and also about an hour a day downloading. Naturally, I was a bit concerned about the security of just using

cards, but I didn't have any problems, which is more than I can say about the mosquitoes in Washington.

I spent about 3 months before I left, preparing, researching, and just getting into the right mindset before I embarked on this trip. I can truly say that the time spent before the trip was as important to my success as the time I spent on my trip. I think the biggest key to a successful photo adventure is approaching it from the right perspective. Being open to whatever comes along, and not letting yourself be disappointed when things don't go the way you expect, in many cases, made for my most successful shots.

Anyone can go to a location, find a postcard, and go out to reproduce someone else's picture, but it takes an artist to be able to bring their own interpretation into the picture. Remember that any adventure is about your unique experience, and not about what

a guide-book says you should be doing, seeing, feeling. It is about capturing your moment in time, your interpretation, your vision. If you're living someone else's interpretation, you'll never be able to step outside of their shadow, and into you own creativity.

The value of a trip such as mine was really in getting away from my everyday life, and stepping into the nature that as a photographer I strive to interpret. I find by bringing myself out of my daily routine, and forcing myself to live in the moment of whatever location I end up in, I am free to explore my creativity, and to most importantly grow as an artist and an individual.

