

Photo Destinations: A Day's Drive

by Photographer Raymond Klass

In some ways nature photography has come to be associated with the far away nature – with the pristine wilderness that can only occur in a select few exotic locations. The truth of the matter is that you don't have to fly to the Galapagos, chase polar bears in Alaska, or capture ripples on the Sand Dunes of Namibia to create successful and evocative nature images.

When I first began photographing, I wasn't old enough for a driver's license, and so for better

or worse, I was confined to shooting in my local neighborhood. Even when I finally got my drivers license, I couldn't travel to those far off places you only read about in magazines. I had to look for what opportunities I had within a days drive of my home.

Sometimes what we see as our limiting constraints – my in-ability to travel to those illusive, natural places – can become a springboard for our personal creativity and innovation. One of the biggest creative traps we can fall into is this idea of "the



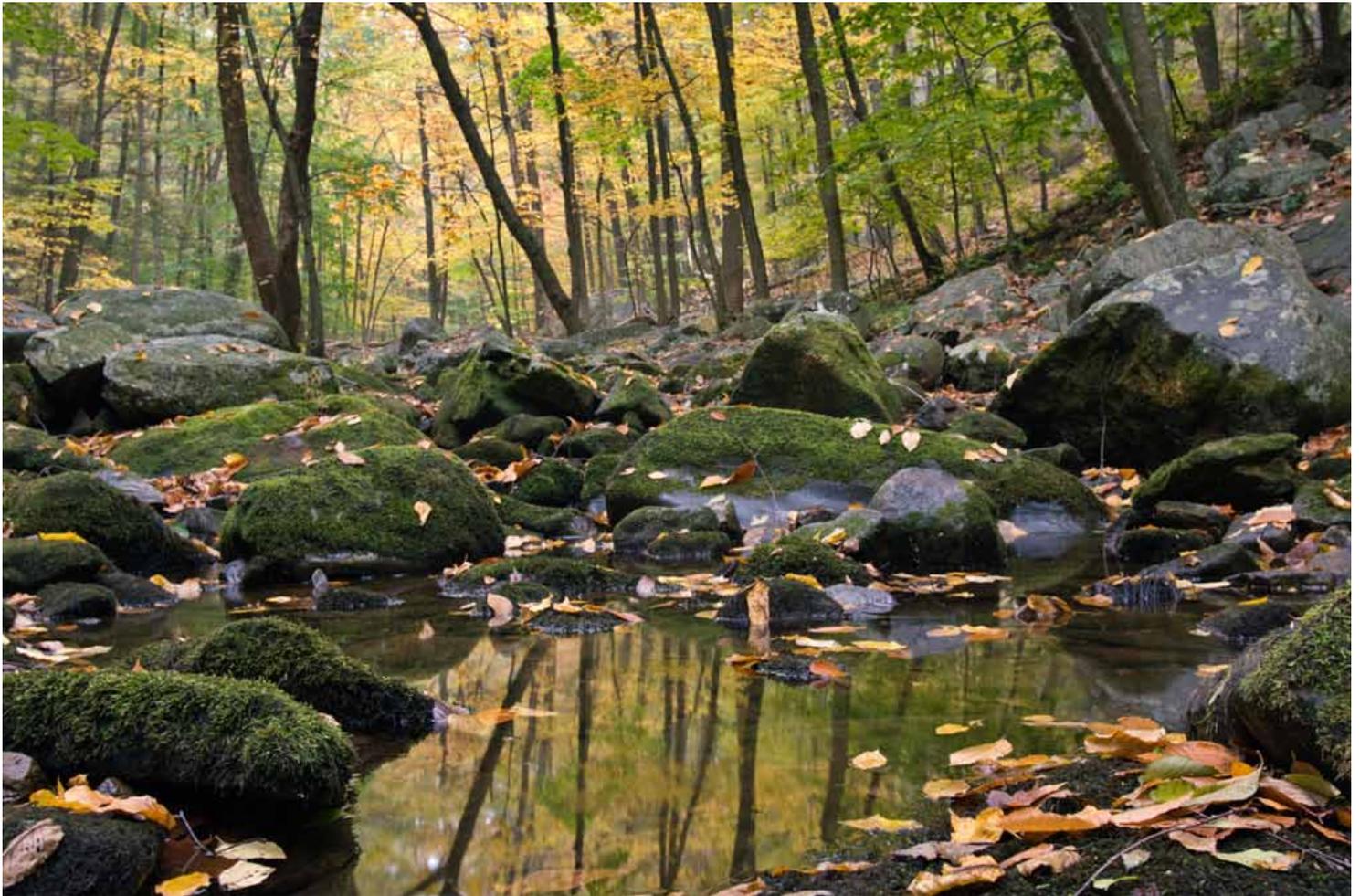
picture is always better somewhere else”, or “If I only had this new piece of equipment I would get the shot”.

We all desire to take better pictures, and it is only natural to look for that new location, or new tool to take us there. The trap here is if we turn to a new location, or a new tool without taking the time to explore the options we already have. This “grass is always greener on the other side” philosophy doesn’t support the artistic process – the creative process. It undercuts our ability to develop this innovation within our artwork.

One of the best experiences in my development as a photographer came when I was accepted as an Artist-in-Residence at Mammoth Cave National Park in Kentucky. I lived at the park for 3 months and photographed the above and below ground full time. Quite literally I was limited to photographing around my house, day in and day out. I explored







the trails, forests, cave passages, and after a couple weeks, I started to wonder how I would shoot the same scenes over and over again – after all, the landscape wasn't changing.

Being forced to re-photograph the same area over and over again did something special – it forced me to take different images – to try different angles and to take chances. Often when we first visit a location we play it safe – we take the shot we know will work. The second and third time, we have the freedom to take risks – to put our creativity to work.

It is important to give yourself that opportunity to go beyond what you shot the last time you were at a location – to take the creative risk – to develop that aspect of your art.

Next time you can, take some time to explore the great photographic locations within a day's drive of your home. Visit and re-visit these places. Become an expert of your own backyard, and you'll learn how to be a successful, creative photographer wherever you may travel to next.