

Scenic Light

*Text &
Photography by Bob Evans*

Photographers Guide to Landscape and Nature Photography in California

For many of us we participate in outdoor activities such as golf, skiing, and camping not only for the pleasure of the sport but for the sheer enjoyment of being in the outdoors. As John Muir stated “We need that occasional dose of glad tidings brought about by the outdoor experience”.

We as photographers can attest this is certainly a part of our goal, however the basic purpose to each of us can be varied. Some revel in the challenge of perfecting that perfect image, the challenge of perfect exposure, the finest composition, and the sharpest image. Others, such as myself combine that goal of technical excellence, and composition, with the objective of sharing the vision of the natural world with others. Although these reasons are quite varied the common end is to capture our reality of ‘being’, and communicating it either to ourselves at a later time, sharing our experiences with others, or allowing the viewer to be in that magic place we experienced.

All these objectives are admirable, but they just don’t seem to all come together if we are constrained to our back yard world. Unless of course we had yards like Monet! For this reason, I suggest, is why photographers travel to other countries and places to investigate our experiences and to capture them on film.

With this in mind I began my investigations into the many scenic and wild places right here in our own back yard of California. It has been some 14 years now, which I have found the more you look, the more you see within our own state.

I have laid out this guide in basic quadrants and have included some of my favorite places. By all means I have **not** found them all so please use this guide only as a beginning and start looking yourself.

Northwestern California.

If redwoods and the ocean is your thing then consider the Northern most part of California in Humboldt, and the northern counties. For redwoods and the beauty of wild rhododendrons try Redwood State Park 27 miles north of Eureka. It takes a little time to get there but it's worth it. The area is very accessible with only short and easy hikes. Also look for dirt roads off the main Hiway that are accessible by regular cars that take you back into the old growth redwoods for a real treat.

While you are in the neighborhood travel south approximately 12 miles to Patrick's Point State Park. In the park lies Agate Beach, that is shown below.

You will have to ask for directions but the locals all know the fern canyon. On a still day it is narrow and full of maidenhair ferns to offer great photos.

Northern California Central

Three locations stand out here as worth the trip. The first is the farthest north, Mt. Shasta. The beauty and grandeur of big mountains, really a dormant volcano, which lies in wait, have many photogenic opportunities. The best shooting is either due north of the town of Shasta, or south to the town of McCloud. The shots are outstanding.

Traveling south on I-5 we reach Redding and heading east on 299 we then reach Burney Falls. These falls emanate from the porous volcanic rock where the water literally seeps out of the mountainside. Also, in these falls are the nests of one species of swallows whose only habit in the world are these falls.

The third stop down the Sacramento valley is Lassen National Park. Here we find another dormant volcanic as well as long hardened lava flows from the last eruption in 1913. The area offers many types of plant life and a wide variety of landscape options as well. Make sure you travel over the top on the peak on Hiway 89. This will take you past some glacial lakes with green blue water.

If you continue down 89 to the Feather River canyon many more good spots are yours for the taking.

The Sierra Nevada

This is probably my favorite location in California. It offers many varied landscape opportunities including, the Sierra Crest, glaciated valleys, wonderful wildflowers and amazing alpenglow light in the early mornings.

Even though entire books have been written on the Sierra alone I will give you a few of my favorite locations.

Without question Yosemite National Park is one of the most beautiful and most visited locations in the Sierra Nevada. However with a little patience you can still find new images to capture. As John Muir once said” We all need a good dose of glad tidings” which can be found on trips to the Yosemite. In addition to the Valley and the glaciated formations don’t pass up the opportunity to visit other areas such as Toulumne Meadows, Glen Aulin and Cathedral Lakes. These areas open up to vast open scenics that can create dynamic landscapes.

On the east side of Yosemite we are blessed with the Sierra Crest and many glaciated valleys. Beginning just south of Bridgeport on Highway 395, turn east onto a one lane road which is marked with a sign “The Ghost Town of Bodie”. For those who have not visited here it is a great opportunity to shoot old and dilapidated houses and buildings from a once booming gold town. The time of day here is not as important as Bodie lies in a valley, which hides it from both sunrise and sunset. One of the most scenic areas in the Southern Sierra is 1000 Island Lake, in the Ansel Adams Wilderness. Start from Agnew Meadows due east of Mammoth Lakes on highway 203 and either hike or take horses up to the 11000 foot level under Banner Mountain and Ridder Peak. The mornings are terrific for wildflowers and alpenglow alike.

Further down State 395 only 10 miles south of Mammoth Lakes is a turn off called Tom’s Place. Traveling up this canyon to 10000 feet we reach the trailhead for Rock Creek Lakes. Within 4 miles of this point are 7 sub-alpine lakes and 14000-foot peaks, which are well worth 2-3 days if possible.

We offer 2 different dates for workshops based from Bishop that concentrate on the many dynamic areas in and around the 395 corridors.

Southern Sierra Nevada and beyond.

One of nature’s closely guarded secrets is the Bristle Cone pine. Only a few groves are scattered in the western states and only one location is in California. The

fascination for me is the fact that they are proven to be the oldest living things on earth. Methuselah has been tested at over 4000 years, which is located in the Schulman grove of the White Mountains. To get there head south on Highway 395 from Bishop 10 miles to State Route 168. Turn east and travel approximately 20 miles to the left hand turn-off for the Bristle Cone Forest. Travel north another 10 miles to the grove. In addition to the gnarled and weathered pines at Schulman Grove you can also take a dirt road 12 more miles to the Patriarch Grove. Here at elevations of over 11000 feet the dry air and near zero humidity nearly embalms the trees. Take your time shooting and you will be rewarded with fine images of these magnificent trees. If you plan to be there at sunset you will be treated with the “Earth Shadow” which is only found in high places.

Driving south from Bishop about 60 miles we come to the town of Lone Pine. Here are several great photographic locations. First is the Alabama Hills. Known originally for the filming of most Hollywood western movies, but now offers great places to shoot weathered rock formations and sunsets. In addition you will find yourself directly below Lone Pine peak, Mount Morrison and Mount Whitney.

All these locations are best shot during sunrise hours.

Considerably south from the White Mountains is a totally different but beautiful valley of death. Death Valley is a great area to visit in early March to early April. Desert wildflowers and sand dunes abound with photo opportunities. While the colored rock and strata formations also give great shooting. Don't forget to stop and shoot the late afternoon at Bad Water. This area has great reflections and an eerie appearance that is seldom seen. To get to Death Valley take the first main highway south of the town of Lone Pine on 395 and follow the signs.

Our last stop on this short tour is almost the farthest south you can go without running into Mexico. Again the beauty of desert wildflowers abound. Anza Borrego State Park is literally covered in the early spring with Dune Evening Primrose, Sand Verbena, Organ Pipe Cactus, Datura, and Desert Lupine just to name a few. For directions the best bet is to use Mapquest as there is no good direct route to take.

This is the second of a planned series of articles that guide you through the visual California, from the perspective of a photographer, and for photographers.

Bye for now, good shooting!

Text and photography by Bob Evans

www.sceniclight.com