

SCENIC WILD PHOTOGRAPHY

- DECEMBER, 2003 -

Greetings!

Hard to believe it had been a month since I last put the newsletter together. Having just seen the last of Fall in the canyons of Southern Utah, I came home to find a city covered in a thick blanket of snow. Just a week before there wasn't a hint of white on the Wasatch Mountains slopes, and a just few short days later the first of the local ski resorts opened its gates.

Yesterday I went on my first snowshoe excursion for the season, trudging through deep virgin powder on paths that just a couple of weeks before were covered in a golden gown of aspen leaves. In these days of war and economic strife it was sobering to see Nature go on about its age-old cycle, oblivious to the problems we made for ourselves, continuing to offer endless amounts of beauty for those who take the time to seek it. Through hard times, the wilderness experience was always a powerful healer for me. The immense beauty of mountains and deserts, combined with the solitude and primordial silence, underscored by the almost-imperceptible heartbeat of all life forms, their paths and cycles converging and diverging, created, destroyed, and reborn, pierces through layers and masks and shields to deliver a potent dose of inspiration to an ailing heart. For as long as you choose to immerse yourself in this timeless beauty you are at one with the world, both a spectator and an actor in the powerful play of creation – the **true** greatest show in Earth, or any other celestial body.



Good light to you all,

Guy

New Service: Print of the Month

Many of you heard me complain about the limitations of the Web as a medium for viewing photography. Issues range from loss of detail due to size and compression to inconsistent color on different systems. Well – I decided to do something about it. I recently launched a new subscription service allowing users to receive a fine-art print every month for a fraction of the full cost (you can save up to 50%). Each month, I will personally hand-select an image from my collection and make individual prints for all subscribers. If you're someone who appreciates fine prints or are looking for a unique present for someone who is – please consider a subscription. More information can be found at the following URL:

<http://www.scenicwild.com/sw/pom/index.jsp>

Photo Tip: Color Casts

Color casts are an often unwelcome surprise to photographers. You find a wonderful scene, you have all the right gear, and you set up at the exact right time to capture what you believe will be a visual masterpiece, only to have your excitement foiled when you pick up your images at the lab or open them in your photo-editing software.

Assuming your technique is good, your film is fresh, and the lab did a good job developing it, two main reasons for resulting color casts are:

1. The way film "sees" vs. the way your eyes do
2. Your eyes see the color cast, but your brain decides this is not something you should be bothered with and compensates for it automatically



The spectrum of color ranges from infrared to ultraviolet. Various optical devices, including your eyes, are only sensitive to part of this spectrum. Film sensitivity may often extend into either of these extremes beyond what the human eye can see. For example, if a film sees further into the UV range than your eye does, strong UV light, invisible to you, may result in a blue or magenta cast in your image.

Color temperature is measured in degrees Kelvin. Higher readings mean colder tones (blue/violet) and lower readings indicate warmer ones. Different light sources can have different color temperatures. Daylight-balanced film indicates the film produces natural colors under most sunlit conditions (usually around 5,500K). Different temperatures will result in color shifts and casts. This is why daylight-balanced film will produce very warm results under tungsten light, and very cold ones under fluorescent light. As outdoor photographers we don't always have a consistent color temperature to work with. The sun may be obscured by clouds or light may be bounced off or filtered through other elements that may change its temperature.

Color-correcting filters can be used to compensate for variations in color temperatures. Most of us are familiar with the warming (81 series) and cooling (80 series) filters. While these were originally developed to allow daylight-balanced film to produce accurate color under artificial light sources, they are very useful in the field as well. The real challenge is matching the right filter with the right light conditions. The best (and unfortunately least-practical) way to do so is using a color temperature meter. In the absence of one, some rules of thumb can be applied – shaded scenes will have an inherently high color temperature, often requiring the use of warming filters. 81A will give slight warming for scenes in shaded but well-lit areas (e.g. under a tree or light cloud cover), 81B or stronger may be required for heavy shade (inside a slot canyon, under thick gray clouds, etc.) These estimations usually work quite well. Cooling filters are not often used in landscape photography. One potentially contentious use for them can be for fire-lit subjects. Still, even then, most viewers usually prefer a warmer, redder color scheme so correction may not be needed.

As for the brain – if you ever wore tinted glasses for a while and removed them you surely noticed the world looking different for a few seconds. This is your brain compensating for the difference in color temperature. For example, wearing yellow tinted glasses will have the world looking yellowish for a while, and then normal. As soon as you remove them everything will look bluish for a while. This is a useful feature for most, allowing the conscious mind to see things consistently, but photographers often need to see actual color casts. The good news is you do see them and you can train your brain to not fully eliminate the effect. If you know that a bright blue sky above should be reflecting some blue off some elements in your composition, you can concentrate on seeing it. Knowing it is there will make it easier. You may not be able to completely eliminate the effect, but with some effort it can be mitigated.

Now that we understand how casts are caused, we can be conscious of correcting them to avoid surprises. But what if one creeps up anyway? Good news – not all is lost, especially if you have photo editing software (like Photoshop) at your disposal. Note though that your computer screen has its own color temperature that can be adjusted. You will have a much better chance of eradicating color casts if you work on a color-calibrated monitor. Fixing the cast on an uncalibrated screen may end up looking good to you but may still appear incorrect on other systems.

A couple of tricks to mitigate color casts in Photoshop (any one will usually do the job but in particularly difficult cases, two or more may be required):

- Bring up the Hue/Saturation dialog (Ctrl-U) or, better yet, create a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer. From the Edit drop-down list at the top, select the color closest to the cast color you are seeing, and drag the Saturation slider to the left.
- Bring up the Color Balance dialog (Ctrl-B) or, better yet, create a Color Balance adjustment layer. Identify the color closest to the cast color, and pull the appropriate slider away from it, towards the complementary color.
- Bring up the Levels dialog (Ctrl-L) or, better yet, create a Levels adjustment layer. From the Channel drop-down at the top, select the color closest to your cast color, then drag the middle slider (under the histogram) to the right to reduce the amount of this color in the image.

Southern Utah Trip Report

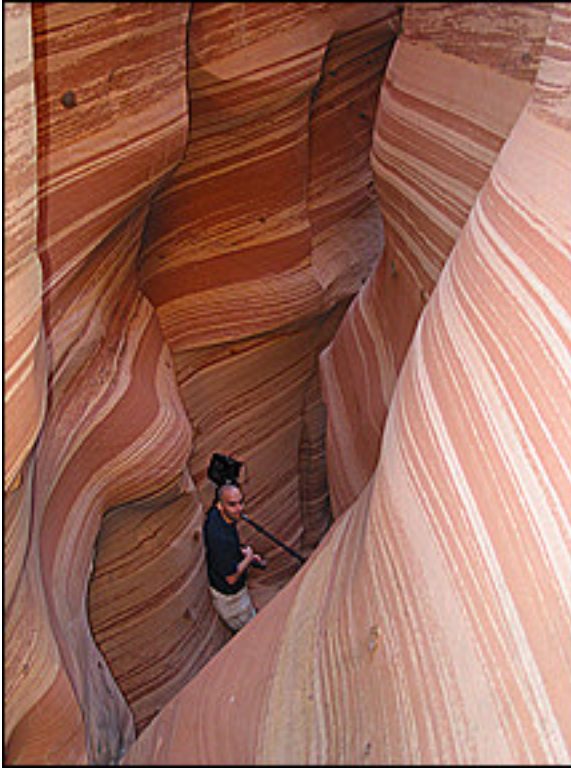


Image by Adam Gibbs

On a chilly Fall morning, a group of us gathered at Zion National Park to explore and photograph the late Autumn color in the surrounding canyons. In attendance were Canadian photographers Adam Gibbs and Matthew Wheatley, representing the Centennial State was photographer and geologist Steve Weaver, hailing from the Golden State was desert explorer "Seldom Seen Steve" Cole, and of course yours truly. The original plan was to stay around the park and photograph the colorful display of maples, oaks, boxelders, and cottonwoods for a few days. We did find some wonderful color in the upper elevations in the lesser explored regions of the park. On our second day the park shuttle shut down for the year and the main canyon was opened to private vehicles. After enjoying some solitude and wonderful Fall scenery in the high country, we decided to check on things along the Virgin River, down to the Temple of Sinawava. That proved rather disappointing. Not only was color very spotty, but hordes of people were everywhere along the main drive. This is, of course, what the National Park was created for, but not what we were after. Without so much as stopping, we turned around and headed for the solitude of Grand-Staircase Escalante, where we spent the rest of our trip exploring remote slot canyons and other sandstone wonders.

On the last evening, westerly winds drove smoke from the California fires into Utah and Arizona, darkening the skies. As I made my way back to Salt Lake City I discovered these same winds also brought the season's first snow storm to the Utah Rockies. We had timed our trip well. New images can be seen in the "Most Recent Work" gallery on my web site (<http://www.scenicwild.com>).

Photo Musings: Northern Utah

The state of Utah is well known for its National Parks – Arches, Canyonlands, Zion, Bryce Canyon, and Capitol Reef, all situated among the majestic settings of red rock canyons, mighty rivers, tall mesas, hoodoos, and arches of the Colorado Plateau. Few realize the beauty of Utah's lesser-known state parks, wilderness areas, monuments, and other natural treasures.



Utah is, for the most part, a desert state dominated by rock and sandstone vistas. Yet, as you move North the scenery gradually changes into high desert, with such unique areas as the Bonneville Salt Flats, and the Great Salt Lake, and eventually into mountain forests, meadows, towering granite and quartzite peaks, and crystal-clear alpine lakes that adorn the Wasatch and Uinta ranges – part of the Rocky Mountains.

To residents of the state, the relative anonymity of much of its wild lands is both a blessing and a curse. It provides a rare opportunity to enjoy true solitude in pristine scenery on one hand, while at the same time making it difficult to raise awareness to the constant challenges of preservation and land use.

To a nature lover, these places are pure inspiration - ancient and vast, mysterious and ever changing. They are timeless beauty to heal the soul and bring forth primal joy of simple things like color, scent, sound, texture, a cool breeze or a warm ray of sunshine. Then there is the quickening of the heart - a rustle in the bushes, a distant howl in the twilight, booming thunder overhead, a mix of fear and excitement as one faces nature, the real nature as it always was and always will be, ruthless and beautiful at the same time. To some, perhaps, nature photography means nature as seen through the lens from a safe distance. To others it is an expression of embracing our role as living beings, of distilling some of the immense beauty in the natural world while experiencing it as it is, on its terms.

The challenge to a landscape photographer is just that – distilling: finding and capturing these moments where things align, when beauty transcends the mundane, and visual elements intertwine to a harmonious composition. The beautiful scenery is there, but it cares not for pleasing composition or the quality of light at any moment in time. This is where the artist comes in, arranging in a frame the scattered elements into a story, anticipating and chasing the light, bringing it all together to create an evocative image capable of communicating the visual experience and impressing the grandeur of a fleeting moment on viewers for generations to come.

News and Upcoming Events

At this time several new images have been posted to the site, making for a total of 120 at the time of this writing. All are available as fine-art prints in either LightJet or Ultrachrome Inkjet (what some like to call Gicleé) and a selection of papers to meet all needs. I'm very happy to review and explain these options in detail to anyone contemplating a purchase.

Readers Notes

A couple of people mentioned the poor quality of images as they appear in the PDF document. This is an unfortunate compromise of the medium in an attempt to limit size and bandwidth requirements. More and more images are now available in larger sizes (750 pixels on the long side) with lower compression on the web site. As you view an image, look for the green "Large Version Available" button. Most of these larger images are 200-300K in size.

Any feedback, requests, and suggestions is welcome and appreciated. Please email me at scenicwild@scenicwild.com.