

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

Getting good scenic photographs

By Melvin Hartley

You don't have to travel far to find inspiration for capturing West Virginia's scenic beauty. From the Potomac Highlands to the New River Gorge, West Virginia offers numerous areas for any adventurous photographer. There is so much to see and capture -- from mountain vistas, waterfalls, old structures, farms, to wildlife.

Landscapes tell stories. While photographing the New River Gorge area, I reflect on its history. The land was once used by Simon Kenton, one of the first frontiersmen in the region. The Mary Ingles Trail went through the gorge, following footpaths used by the Shawnee and Cherokee, who used the area as their primary hunting grounds. The rise of the Coal Age led to the building of mining complexes, such as Nuttallburg.

Now, we have the rise of outdoor adventure sports, along with hunting and fishing, which fuel the local economies. This landscape also brings us great joy by letting us be in the moment with nature, by letting us watch the sunrise or sunset on the mountain range or plateau.

No one is born a photographer. Even professional photographers learn their skills one at a time, just like everyone else. I got into photography because I wanted to document the beautiful National Parks and other places that I visited, and to share them with others. I'm self-taught. I enjoyed the challenge of discovering on my own how the camera operated. I started slow, learning what each dial and button was for and how it impacted my image.

The first step is learning to make a good exposure -- learn the exposure "triangle" of ISO, shutter speed and aperture, and how each one affects the other to get a good exposure. The ISO lets you dial in the light sensitivity of the camera's sensor. Dialing in too high an ISO can create digital noise in your images.



One of Melvin Hartley's photos of New River Gorge Bridge. (Photo courtesy of Melvin Hartley)

The camera's shutter speed is what lets you freeze or add motion to your images. The last part of the triangle, the aperture, affects the depth of field (how much of your image is sharp and in focus).

The three key elements of photography are light, composition and subject. The word "photography" means "writing with light." We can all learn to write better by exploring and understanding light. There are four types of light in landscape photography: diffused light, the really soft light that you get on an overcast, cloudy day; side light, the light we can get during the first hour in the morning and the last hour in the evening; backlight, which is what you get by pointing your camera at the bright sun; and magic light, the perfect light, which is what we all want as photographers.

The second most important element in making a good photograph is composition. A good technique in composition is to emphasize perspective. Do this by anchoring the image to a subject in the foreground, such as a flower, rock formation, something interesting, and letting it lead the eye to your main subject. Another technique is to find a frame within a frame with tree branches or boulders. If the sky is interesting, angle the camera to include more

of it. Use lead-in lines, which could be a fence, creek, railroad tracks or trail.

Last, but not least, is subject or moment. Find something interesting to shoot. Go to the high ground, find something in the foreground to anchor your shot, to give the viewer a sense that they are standing at the spot where you are standing, then include a grand vista of the scenery in the background. This works well at overlooks. Use a tripod to eliminate camera shake.

When you find a good location, if the light is not right, visit the site again. Landscapes and weather are under constant change. The seasons and weather patterns add new scenery and different lighting each time you visit.

So, know your camera, and know the components of exposure. Find your style, keep shooting and it will develop. Study art, look at art, look at and read photography books and magazines.

Go slowly and enjoy the journey. Mistakes will be made; learn from them.

Hope to see you out there and hear your shutters clicking.

Melvin Hartley is retired and lives in Fayetteville.

On taking the scenic route

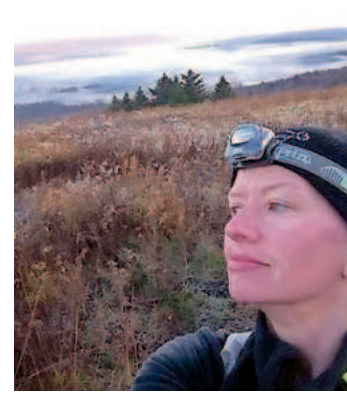
By Andrea Bond

I love road trips. Whether it's some grand cross-country adventure or merely a day trip, there's just something special about loading up the car, rolling down the window and cranking up the music.

On these trips some of the best memories are made. Memories that affirm the journey is every bit as important as the destination. Memories that teach us to slow down and savor the moment.

Years ago while driving to Syracuse, I made a "slight detour" (it was a couple hours out of my way, actually) to see Niagara Falls. The falls were spectacular, of course, but the part that sticks out most in my mind was the massive cloudburst that hit just as I neared my destination. Sheets of rain pounded the car, blinding me and every other driver and forcing us to pull off the road.

Five minutes later, the rain stopped as abruptly as it had started. I put the window back down and got a whiff of that distinct, clean ozone scent that is present only after a hard rain. I pulled back onto the road, blasting my favorite Josh Ritter song, "Wolves" -- and caught my first glimpse of the mist rising high off the falls just as the sun broke through the clouds and the music swelled to a climax. It was one of those rare and special moments I still cherish.



The road trips I have taken are rife with wondrous discoveries -- from learning that the massive rain storm beating the earth directly ahead of me on the flat plains of eastern South Dakota was actually nearly a hundred miles away (it took over an hour of driving to finally catch the storm) to spotting a bald eagle perched on a power line in Idaho, prompting me to stop in the middle of the road to gawk (thus incurring the wrath of several drivers who made liberal use of their horns).

Likewise, my travels on West Virginia's winding mountain roads have taken me through places I wouldn't have discovered otherwise and shown me the most amazing sights, both nature-made and man-made. On these back roads I have discovered little country churches and antique stores, beautifully rendered and quirky works of art, all manner of wildlife, and, of course no shortage of jaw-dropping scenery.

I recall the startling moment when -- headed to the Cheat River for a kayaking trip -- I rounded a bend and came nearly face to face (so to speak) with one of the many massive wind turbines that line the ridge. Naturally I had to stop the car and get a closer look at the workings.

What was meant to be a brief visit to Spruce Knob -- the highest point in the state -- was extended by a couple of hours when I discovered the fields of wildflowers that peppered the hillside on the way to the summit were nearly as beautiful as the overlook itself.

And if I hadn't taken a meandering drive through McDowell County after visiting Homer Hickam's boyhood home in Coalwood ("Home of the Rocket Boys"), I would never have known there existed a little community called Cucumber (population 94) in which a sign tacked to a fence pole cheerfully announces "Pickle City U.S.A." If I'm driving anywhere I've never before been, you can pretty much count on me being the last to arrive -- often with an iPhone loaded with new photos and shoes soaked from wading through roadside weeds and mud.

I have no regrets.

Andrea Bond lives in South Charleston and is a member of the West Virginia Mountain Trail Runners.



Outdoor Pursuits digital newsletter set to debut

Whether it's hiking, biking, boating, touring, hunting or fishing, your next outdoor adventure can begin in your inbox.

The Charleston Gazette-Mail is launching a digital newsletter called *Outdoor Pursuits*, which will focus on travel and the outdoors. "We're doing something really cool with *Outdoor Pursuits*," said Glen Flanagan, the Gazette-Mail digital content manager. "You'll find articles and

videos on all kinds of things -- ranging from hunting and fishing to cool places to travel in West Virginia."

Flanagan said the newsletter will bring together the best outdoors-related content in one package. "If you like to discover new places, this is for you. If you like to hunt and fish, this is for you. There's something for everyone to enjoy," he said.

"You can get it on your computer, on your phone -- anywhere you can check

your email. It's easy and it's fun."

The newsletter will be launched in March. Subscriptions are free.

Sign up for the *Outdoor Pursuits* digital newsletter today. Just go to wvgazette-mail.com and click the "newsletters" link.

If you'd like to be a sponsor, call 304-348-4860 to reserve your ad space and get information about value packages.

Five mountain escapes to take solo

Want to just escape and unwind by yourself? West Virginia has loads of activities for solo travelers to tackle! Here are five that fit the bill:

1. Learn to cook like a 5-star chef

The Greenbrier is an amazing place to take a solo getaway already, but why not spice it up a bit with its culinary demonstrations? A Greenbrier chef will give you step-by-step instructions to prepare one of their signature dishes. You'll be the envy of your friends the next time you cook at home.

The best part is: demonstrations are included for guests of the resort.

2. Pamper yourself

Looking for a bit of pampering? Indulge in the natural mineral waters of the Roman Baths at the Berkeley Springs State Park spa, or go for the full Swedish-style massage. Besides, you deserve it, don't you?

3. Learn to kayak

A solo getaway is the perfect opportunity to learn something new. West Virginia has some of the best kayaking around, and many outfitters in the New River Gorge offer half-day and full-day lessons.

Local whitewater outfitters can take you on

awesome kayak trips that put you and your instructor on some Class I whitewater rapids. If you're a quick learner, you may even get to move up to Class II. Before you know it, you'll be chopping through some of the best whitewater in America!

4. Spend a night in a haunted asylum

Looking for a thrilling adventure? How about spending the night at the Trans-Allegheny Lunatic Asylum? You can book a night, but you won't exactly be sleeping. After a brief tour, you can break off with a few folks, or venture alone on an all-night ghost hunt in the mammoth gothic structure. Did we mention you won't be sleeping?

5. Take a luxury fishing trip

Want to get away from the hustle and bustle? Try a luxury cabin and a private-access trophy trout stream at Harman's. Nothing says relaxing like getting away for a little fishing. You can even learn to fly fish with some of the pros. After all, this is a filming spot for the award-winning tv show, "Fly Rod Chronicles."

Explore more trip ideas at www.GoToWV.com or call 800-225-5982. Share your Real West Virginia stories on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram with #GoToWV and #RealWV.



South Charleston Activities

2017 EVENTS

- March 17** St. Patrick's Day -- LaBelle Theatre
- March 25** Rhythm and Brews
- Apr. 21-30** WV International Film Festival
- May 20** Armed Forces Day Parade
- Aug. 4** S.C. Day at Appalachian Power Park
- Aug. 9** City's 100 Year Anniversary
- Aug. 16-19** Summerfest
- Aug. 19** Mound Car Show
- Sept. 9** Arts & Crafts Mound Festival
- Oct. 15** SC First Nazarene Block Party
- Oct. 20-29** WV International Film Festival
- Oct. 21-22** Rock & Gem Show
- Dec. 9** Christmas Parade

Contact Information: Bob Anderson (304) 546-5488; Mary Basham or Beth Justice (304) 746-5552

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