

A Song for the Asking
The Electronic Newsletter of
EarthSong Photography,
America the Beautiful Photography Workshops,
and
Photography with Heart Workshops: Walking in Beauty

May 31, 2007

Volume V, Number 4

Hello to All

Three feet in front of me the land falls away, not entirely gradually, into a stillness through which only the river is moving. It is moving now as it has for thousands, perhaps millions of years, slowly here because the valley is fairly wide and its floor is level. It gives no indication of the tumult it could display only twenty-five, or so, miles downstream, when it passes between the Cheoah, the Yellow Creek, and the Unicoi Mountains to the south and west, and the Great Smokies to the northeast. Where this happens the river is fierce and wild; at least it was a hundred years ago before the dams that now strangle its might were built. The dams have names like Fontana, Cheoah, and Calderwood. In those old days the river dropped powerfully over titanic falls and roaring cascades and rapids on its way through the mountains and into the great valley of the Tennessee, where it added significantly to the volume of that awesome stream; so much so that it was given the diminutive of the same name: the Little Tennessee, perhaps lesser, but only barely.

The river is, however, only tangential to the story I want to tell you; but it is an element to be borne in mind always, as we go



along. The river is a part of the land through which it flows, and thus can never be thought of as separate from it, no matter how you may think of land, or rivers. It was still completely dark when I arrived on this spot above the stillness and the river. Even the early birds had not yet roused, nor begun to twitter among the grasses, the river canes, and the trees that march below me along the flanks of the flow, among the huge old sycamores – the ghost trees, the poplars, the willows, the cedars, the pines on the slopes across the valley on the other side. Now the light is coming rapidly into a sky draped with only a few thin, low clouds, mostly to the north and west where the mountains lie. Because of a bend in the watercourse it would appear that the light is growing from directly upstream, yet in the larger scheme of geography I know that the river is moving from south to north and that the sun is, in truth, rising more from behind the Cowee Mountains which lie generally to the east of where I stand. When it does arrive, it will be very

bright very quickly, and that harshness of contrast will overcome my purpose in being where I am; for I have come to record the very early warm light that will fall on this place, this very special place, on this morning; and I must be ready. There is no word in any of the languages of First Peoples which can be translated as "religion." It was only among the Europeans who came lately that there existed the need to separate the religious from life's other aspects, in both word and deed. For First Peoples, every part of existence was suffused with the spiritual; there was no room for a division that carved it out as something apart. To be alive each day was to live in Spirit. There was no commandment to keep one day holy, for every day was holy; and in just the same way, there was no one day on which the earth was honored as being special, because on each and every day the earth was gratefully acknowledged as the gift of the Creator. In each day, Spirit and Earth were inextricably interconnected. So the irony of my presence here in this moment is not lost as I prepare for the light, but it does not diminish in any way the hallowedness that I feel as this day arrives. It has been a long time in coming.



It is Monday, the 23rd day of April.

Yesterday, the 22nd, the traditional day on which the secular holiday known as Earth Day has been celebrated since 1970, was Sunday, a holy day that even traditional Tsalagi are willing to acknowledge out of respect for the customs of the dominant culture. This

being so, April 23rd became Earth Day for this year, and on this day a very special ceremony will honor the occasion; a circle once broken will again become round and full. Where I stand, the council house once stood. It was the apex of the great truncated mound, which rose perhaps a hundred feet, or more, above the river.

The time of the construction of the mound recedes into the dim mists of memory. Archaeologists say that around 600 a.d. is a thoughtful estimate. The council house, or its predecessors, would date from the same. Around the mound, along the river, the village stood - the hundreds of dwellings of those who at some time came to know themselves as Ani' -Yũñ' wiya, the Principal People.

It was a busy, bustling place, a commercial center, the business and diplomatic hub of the Middle Cherokee Nation. **William Bartram** described it that way when he made an extended visit in 1775, the year before **General Griffith Rutherford's** soldiers would burn it to the ground, along with the crops in the field, the stores already put up for the coming winter; all in an attempt to deprive the inhabitants of the means of survival and, thus, to discourage them from associating themselves with the British in the revolution of the colonies that was exploding across the eastern seaboard.

In 1819, beautiful Cowee would be lost to the Ani-Yunwiya, ceded by treaty to the United States of America to be sold to the land speculators who would profit by selling it, in turn, to the settlers who were spilling into the mountains. In 1827

one of those settler families, the Halls, would acquire Cowee, the land on which the village and its mound had stood for more than a thousand years. Fortunately, the Halls and their descendants were thoughtful stewards and the land was cared for well, so that into the beginning of the twenty-first century, though most of the evidence of the village



site was lost, the primary damage to the mound consisted of a lowering of its height and a grading of its slope to accommodate the exigencies of farming. To stand where I stand on this warm spring morning is to sense what is obvious to the trained eye: this rise above the Little Tennessee was created by the hand of man for a purpose. It was built here for a reason; it had meaning and that



meaning had significance in the lives of those who erected it. To stand where I am standing is to feel the majesty and presence of Spirit and the sense of a place that is holy; and today Cowee is returning to the Tsalagi.

In 2002 Cowee came to be the property of **James Porter** through the estate of his deceased wife **Katherine Hall**

Porter. Himself of infirm health, James Porter let it be known that his wish for the land was that it be returned to the Tsalagi.

To the good fortune of all, there has been an energetic and active land conservancy organization, the **Land Trust for the Little Tennessee (LTLT)**, whose on-going efforts have already led to a number of conservation successes in the area. Among these, the 4500-acre Needmore Tract was, through the work of LTLT, purchased in 2004 by the State of North Carolina and has become part of the public trust. The Needmore Tract is not far downstream from Cowee. LTLT began negotiating a purchase that would include Cowee and began working with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians for the sale of 71 acres surrounding the

mound as a part of the larger parcel. James Porter was a willing seller and the Tsalagi were willing buyers, and today, Earth Day 2007, the transfer of this sacred land back to the Principal People will be celebrated. Cowee will now be conserved in such a way as to promote Tsalagi historic preservation purposes and in accord with a conservation agreement with North Carolina. Cowee is coming home, and I am here on this great mound of earth, in this beautiful and peaceful valley, among these resplendent and ancient mountains at the side of this gently flowing river, to speak to the light that will greet this day and to thank the Creative Power of the Universe that all of these things exist and to pray that it may be so forever.



What's Now?

Lushness is for me an idea that is easily conceived. It is replete with images; it fills my imagination with pictures; in conjures in my mind an astounding profusion of adjectives running all the way from superabundance through excess. And while it might be somewhat knee-jerk to draw a mental snapshot of tropical climes and seemingly impenetrable junglescapes, my conceptual sketches are not those. In my introspections there are mountains, ancient uplifts, whose crowning heights, in the fullness of their youth would have rivaled, and likely surpassed, the might of the Himalayas; but whose mature summits are no longer thought of in lofty numbers, but rather in the glory of their profundity and in the haven they are for so many strands of the web of life. When I think of “lush”, it is the



Smokies that come to mind. To be of temperate latitudes, these old hills are crucibles of living form; it is a fact of which I cannot help but be constantly aware, nor gaze upon in naught but continuous awe. What a joy it is to be of this place. Yet this extravagance of biology is, by no means, accidental; and, when stripped to its essentials, can be summed

in a single word: moisture – moisture by whatever name you choose: water

vapor, humidity, cloud, rain, sleet, snow, ice, all of the above and a lot of it, more, in fact, than any other place in the continental United States except some isolated locations in the Pacific Northwest. Life-giving, life-supporting water.

It is the height of the rainy season; April and May are rainy months, but something is awry. It isn't raining. In Haywood County, North Carolina, where I live, along the crest of the Newfound Mountains, smaller-but-noticeable neighbors to the east of the greater Smokies, it has not rained in three weeks. My neighbor's cows found a way through the fence that enforces our neighborliness and came looking for new grass they spied in my backyard. It wasn't a big deal, but it served to underscore a point: it's very dry at a time when dryness isn't the norm, and there has been a sustained period of warm-temperature days which wouldn't normally be this warm until July and August. We are nearly eight inches of rainfall below normal, year-to-date, here.

Still, there is beauty everywhere you look, and there are pictures to be made from that beauty. Awareness and concern are certainly called for as we move through

this time, but real awareness, in my mind, is not severable from the appreciation of the elegant allure of the natural world. It is the beauty that inspires me to act, and that sustains me even as I act.

It has been an interesting spring thus far, and although the foliage on a great many of the lower-elevation trees can best be described as "spotty",



nature has recovered admirably from the two big freezes of early-April and the green-up in the valleys has concluded. It reached Morton Overlook earlier this week, as well as along the crest of Thomas Divide; and by the end of next week, it will have almost concluded at Clingman's Dome. However, for at least a week afterward the new green color will continue to be quite photogenic and well worth a trip to the high country.

In addition to the remnant greening-up of the mountains in the high elevations, there are flowering things to be photographed. Wild geranium (*Geranium maculatum*) is doing very well throughout the park, especially in Greenbrier and near Chimneys Picnic Area. Bowman's root (*Porteranthus trifoliatum*) is coming in nicely along the middle- and higher-elevation stretches of Newfound Gap Road, especially on the Tennessee side. Solomon's plume, or as it is also known, false Solomon's seal (*Maianthemum racemosum*) and goat's beard (*Aruncus dioicus*) are prolific from just below Chimneytops Trailhead nearly down to Sugarlands Visitors Center. Along Little River Road there are nice clusters of fire pink (*Sinene virginica*). One of my favorite wildflowers, Indian paintbrush

(*Castilleja coccinea*) can be found near Mile High Overlook on Heintooga Ridge Road.

The big story, however, is with the flowering shrubs that are blooming, or about to. Mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) is blooming throughout the the middle elevations, as are the flame azaleas (*Rhododendron calendulaceum*), and in the upper elevations the Catawba rhododendron (*Rhododendron catawbiense*) are about 10-days away from beginning to peak. It will not surprise me if the rosebay rhododendron (*Rhododendron maximum*), which are more lower-elevation and stream bank dwelling, are not at least a week earlier than customary. So the end of June may well be the time to expect them this year.

Water levels in all park streams are significantly lower than you would expect for this time of year. Given the drought conditions that exist, this should come as no surprise, and it will



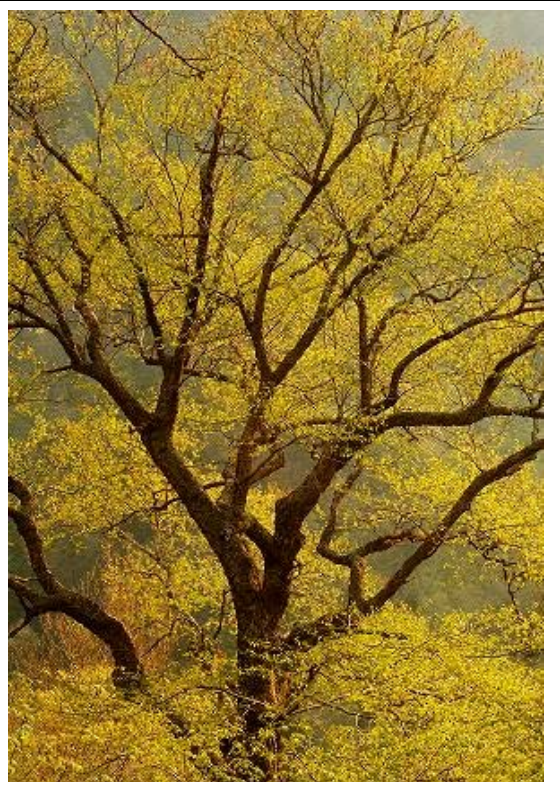
require some considerable rain events to overcome this.

Roaring Fork is generally a good bet, particularly near the Ephraim Bales cabin and the Alfred Reagan tub mill. The usually iridescent green moss on many of boulders in the stream in this area is not as intense this year, but it still makes for an excellent supporting element. The places upper Tremont and Greenbrier can also offer good stream images and there are some areas along Little River Road which would normally not be as accessible with higher water, but are now. Remember to exercise due care in scrambling around on riparian rocks; even in dry weather they can be slippery and dangerous.

The Oconaluftee River in North Carolina is as low as I can remember for this period, and some creativity will be needed to find and capture really striking images.

Upstream from the Kephart Prong Trailhead bridge is one possibility, as are some areas along Bradley Fork, requiring a hike of perhaps one or two miles out of the

back of Smokemont Campground on an easy trail. If you are thinking “waterfalls”, you might consider Flat Creek Falls, which can be reached from Heintooga Ridge Road. There is a trailhead on the left about a mile-and-a-half from where you enter the park from the Blue Ridge Parkway boundary at Black Camp Gap. Follow the trail for about a mile and you will come to a spur trail to the left that will take you to the falls. While water images may be Somewhat limited, opportunities for sunset are not. Morton Overlook is at the peak of its season and the sun is setting directly down the Walker Camp Prong Valley and the distant Cove Mountain. With the ever-present possibility of an afternoon thunderstorm, it would not be unreasonable to spend the better part of a late afternoon at Morton, just photographing the light and cloud forms as they change and waiting for the opportune moment as sunset arrives. It is commonly quite hazy this time of year, so the sun may disappear into a haze bank on the horizon well before it reaches the ridge. The best of all worlds would be a thunderstorm late in the day at the end of a period of high pressure when the atmosphere tends to be clearer, but even if you fail to encounter this optimum, you’re likely to come away with an image to remember.



Other locations to consider for sunset during June are the Mile High Overlook on Heintooga Ridge Road off the Blue Ridge Parkway at Mile Marker 458 and Lickstone Ridge Overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway at Mile Marker 459. For sunrise, the opportunities are much more limited.

Clingman’s Dome parking lot is the best choice for the month; however, Luftee Overlook is always a possibility as long as you are willing to accept only the early light after the sun has topped the Crest of the Smokies ridge, or the pre-dawn color above the valley.

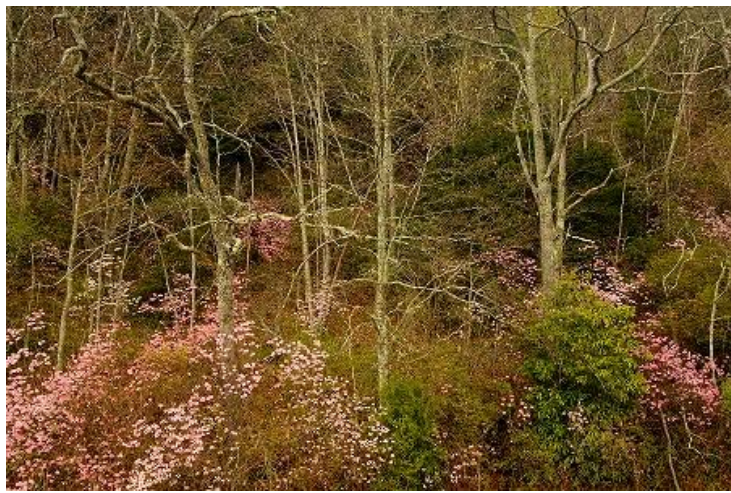
Even in times of stress, these old mountains are filled with beauty. It is a beauty that comes from deep within and radiates outward, up the valleys, over the ridges, and out into the heavens themselves, turning in a great arc to return. The energy of this beauty will sustain these hills through whatever hard times may come; and if you are willing to be patient with and mindful of it, it will reward you time and again with all the art for which you could wish.

A Tip is Worth...?

The Great Way is gateless
There are a thousand roads to it.
If you can pass through this barrier,
You will walk freely throughout the universe.

From Women's Preface To *The Gateless Barrier*

Sometimes it seems as if I cannot turn in any direction, either in life or in my creativity without running into a barrier. Barriers are one of the inevitabilities



of being alive. As adept as is the human mind at devising a seemingly endless array of metaphor with which to describe our world, it seems just proficient at confounding itself with a never-ending litany of ways to distract itself, ranging from simple inattention and shortness of focus to elaborately contrived stories of why it can or

can not, should or should not, will or will not, do or not do anything that it might otherwise consider or wish to do. We were told all sorts of things as children, or we interpreted our own experiences in a particular way; and we internalized those things and now use them as the basis for what we call "reality". Of course, the process continues long beyond childhood into our present lives, and for many of us it slips quietly and unnoticed beneath the radar of our consciousness and hums softly in the background dictating the course of our day-to-day activities behind the shining light of our awareness.

Then, on occasion, something happens that draws our attention, perhaps a pattern of behavior that becomes somehow problematic, and we begin to notice that we are this way or that way in a given situation; or that we have this or that peculiar response to a particular type of stimulus in our lives. Maybe from this we begin to notice other patterns which typify who we are, and we wonder more often about where these patterns arose and how they influence us in ways that are much more subtle than we had realized. We begin to ask "What do I really think,

and how do I really feel, or believe; and how does this influence the things that I do, even my creativity, even the images that I make so facilely and take for granted. And this is the **first step: the recognition that there are barriers to our creativity and to our seeing, and the willingness to look at them without denying their existence or trying to run away from them.**

For example, the unwillingness or inability to be present can be a huge barrier to creativity. Sometimes I am with students who are everywhere but with me. They are always thinking and talking about where they have been or where they are going to be, so that they can hardly focus on what they are looking at through their viewfinder. In consequence, while they may be drawn to beautiful images,



they can never quite seem to create the image that expresses that vision. There are distractions in the composition, or the point of interest is not clear.

Another barrier that is common is one that says I don't, or can't, do certain kinds of images. For a long time one of the barriers with which I struggled was one that told me I am not a macro photographer. Now I have to confess that I may never be a macro photographer of the caliber of my two teaching partners, Nancy and Les, but neither do I have to listen to a voice telling me I don't do macro work. In order to get to that point, however, I have to take the **second step, which is to embrace the barrier. Become intimate with it.** Pay careful attention to it in all of its subtleties; notice the occasions when it presents itself to you. Watch the barrier as it plays itself out in your behavior. What voices does it

use to express itself: one of your parents, maybe; a teacher long gone; your critical self? At the core of every barrier there is a voice that is pulling you away from the present into a past or a future that do not exist. There is a proverb which says, "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." Be patient with yourself and do not expect that just because you have chosen to face them and have become intimate with your barriers, they will automatically disappear. They have invested much effort in their existence and they will not go away merely because you now wish for them to.

And so the **third step is to undertake the work that is required to move beyond the barrier**, to resolve its presence in your creative life, and perhaps in your everyday life as well, for at some point creativity and life are one and the same. Pablo Picasso said this, "I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it." Each barrier is a specific entity unto itself and so a specific action may be needed to resolve it. In general though, I never argue with a barrier; I simply say, "Well, that may be so, but I can try this, ...or I can do this, ...or I can think this, ...or I can feel this." It may be necessary to repeat this

dozens, even hundreds, of times. Barrier resolution is not accomplished without discipline. It is one of the great paradoxes of life that it is only through the exercise of discipline that freedom is ultimately acquired; and yet through that repeated effort, in the case of my macro barrier, for example, there is slowly being born a photographer who can execute competent close-up images. And I know students who have learned to be in this moment, this present moment; and, having learned so, have seen their images take on a quality that is readily apparent to all who view them.

As for Photography with Heart...

As I Walk with Beauty
As I walk, as I walk
The universe is walking with me
In beauty it walks before me
In beauty it walks behind me
In beauty it walks below me
In beauty it walks above me
Beauty is on every side
As I walk I walk with beauty

Traditional Diné Prayer

The good news is that there are two more weeklong workshops in 2007 where Nancy, Les, and I will be together. The not-so-good news for some folks is that both of them are filled and there is a waiting list for each...but there's more good news. The **2008 Photography with Heart Workshop** schedule is now available on Nancy's website, www.NaturalTapestries.com. For information on any of these events you can contact **Marian Birch** at marian@naturaltapestries.com. Les and I will have this information on our



websites shortly, and Les is also working on the new **Photography with Heart website** and hopes to have it ready for unveiling soon. I'm already excited about all the wonderful times we're going to have in the coming year, but I don't want to get too far ahead of myself because there's still plenty think about in '07.

July 5-8, 2007 are the dates for the **Smokies**

Rosebay Workshop. Les and I will be doing this at the **Maggie Valley Inn** in **Maggie Valley, North Carolina**. This is generally within the peak of the blooming season for one of the most beautiful flowering shrubs in the Southern

Appalachians, the rosebay rhododendron (*Rhododendron maximum*), which is found in nearly all elevations of the mountains. Because of this abundance, it is somewhat like fall color in reverse, in that peak blooming times vary with altitude from lower to higher. Of course, we'll be doing lots of other fun stuff as well. The three sunset locations I mentioned in "What's Now?" will be on our list of places, along with



a sunrise from a very special location. There will be other summer flowers, stream opportunities, and macro work galore. We'll certainly spend a lot of time talking about and exploring going beyond the labels and seeing with the heart. To register for this workshop contact don@earthsongphotography.com, (828) 456-5439, or les@appalachianjourney.com, (828) 775-4882. Reservations at **Maggie Valley Inn** can be made at (866) 926-0201 for this event. The fee for this event is **\$975**. This **includes 3-nights lodging and meals**. This could be the experience that will take your summer photography from ho-hum to wow.

On **August 18**, Les and I will be conducting the next in our series of **One-Day Workshops**, this one entitled **A Blue Ridge Parkway Summer**. We'll spend



the day ranging along the highest elevations of this beautiful roadway finding great landscapes and the many wildflowers of mid-summer such as Turk's-cap lily (*Lilium superbum*), coneflower (*Rudbeckia laciniata* var. *humilis*), wood tickseed (*Coreopsis major*), and wide-leaved sunflower (*Helianthus decapetalus*), which often

create small forests of color along and away from the road. Registration is at don@earthsongphotography.com, (828) 456-5439; or les@appalachianjourney.com, (828) 775-4882. The fee for the day is **\$75** and **includes the famous Les' Picnic Lunch**.

September 7-9 are the dates for a very special workshop created for the **CNPA-Raleigh Region**. This workshop will feature the outstanding opportunities offered by **Cades Cove in Late Summer**. Of course, we'll visit some close-by places like Tremont and Little River, but the Cove will receive most of our attention, and in return will reward us with wonderful foggy mornings of intense soft light, dew-covered spiderwebs, late summer wildflowers, wildlife, and history. We'll be working out of the **Talley-Ho Inn in Townsend, Tennessee**. This is a full weekend of field work, classroom work, and critiques. It's limited to **20 participants** from the Raleigh Region on a first-to-register basis. The fee is **\$350**, which **covers the workshop tuition** only. Reservations for lodging can be made through the **Talley-Ho Inn, (800) 448-2465**. **Registration** for the workshop can be done by sending a check for the tuition to **Don McGowan, EarthSong Photography, 280 Rock Garden Drive, Canton, North Carolina 28716**

For additional information contact don@earthsongphotography.com, or **(828) 456-5349**.

If you aren't a member of CNPA-Raleigh and would like to have the experience of this workshop, well, the next weekend Les and I are going to do it again.

September 14-16 are the dates for the **Cades Cove in Late Summer Workshop #2**. This event is also at **Talley-Ho Inn in Townsend, Tennessee**, and will be a repeat of the first. It's likewise limited to **20 participants** and the fee is **\$350**, which **covers the tuition** only. Reservations for lodging can be made through the **Talley-Ho Inn, (800) 448-2465**; and registration for the workshop can be made by sending a check to **Don McGowan, EarthSong Photography, 280 Rock Garden Drive, Canton, North Carolina 28716**. For additional information contact don@earthsongphotography.com, **(828) 456-5439**; or les@appalachianjourney.com, **(828) 775-4882**.

Until next month...may the Spirit of Light guide your shutter release.

This newsletter is sent only to those people who have expressed an interest in receiving it. If you no longer want it, you can get off the mailing list by sending an email requesting removal to don@earthsongphotography.com.





**Contact: Gary Farber, Tel#800-221-1830 ext. 2332, Fax#800-336-3841,
Email-FilmGuyGary@aol.com**

Don McGowan Students' Specials (Expiration: June 30, 2007)

Ask about great price on Epson 2400, 1800, and 3800 printer until the end of the month
Delkin 2gig compact flash card 35.00 150x
Delkin 4gig compact flash cards 150x 59.99
Delkin 8gig compact flash card 150x 119.99
Nikon D80 body 899.99
PhotoShop CS 3 upgrade 189.99 no shipping
Velvia 50 36 2/07 dating 2.75 a roll
Provia F 100 36 2/07 dating 2.75 a roll
Ask about prices on Nikon scanners currently in stock
Colorvision Spyder 2 pro 179.99
Wacom 6x8 Tablet in toll 289.99
Promaster 5-1 Reflector 22-inch 25.00
Hunt's sells Nancy Rotenberg's book *Photography and the Creative Life* 39.99 and a 5.00 shipping charge
Promaster extension tube 110.00 for Nikon
Promaster extension tube 100.00 for Canon
Contact Gary Farber at 1-800-221-1830 ext 2332 or email me at digitalguygary@wbhunt.com