

**A Song for the Asking**  
***The Electronic Newsletter of***  
***EarthSong Photography***  
**and**

***EarthSong Photography Workshops: Walking in Beauty***

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**Hello to All:**

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**For the Love of Hydrogen and Oxygen**

The sound I hear is a clucking noise, almost like chickens scattered across a small expanse of farmyard; but it cannot be, because I am probably 2000' above the nearest farmland, nearly a mile high in the Southern Appalachian's venerable Balsam Range. It is a sound I have heard many times in these mountains and though I cannot see any of

the actors, I know there is a drama unfolding around me. Suddenly from somewhere on the ridge to my right a gliding figure floats silently into my field of vision, dropping in elevation as it descends toward the valley far, far below. The clucking continues for several seconds and then there is quiet all around. The



threat has passed for the moment; the chipmunks have warned each other of the hawk's passing, and the broad-winged raptor's hunt must continue on down the mountain; and I am left to continue my pondering of the wondrous oneness of the natural world, even when that oneness involves the taking of life by one species so that the existence of life's diversity can continue. As an ancient Taoist proverb says, "Between the fragile beauty of the praying mantis and the fire and passion of the winged dragon there is no discord; between the supple silence of the snake and the eagle's claw, there is only harmony."

So many harmonies. Where I am standing, on the shoulder of this great ridge it is

the edge of winter; and although the calendar will tell you that spring began officially more than two months ago, here at 5000' near the apex of Lickstone



Ridge word of its arrival is only now beginning to spread. There is a serviceberry tree (*Amelanchier laevis*) behind me, resplendent in its delicate lacy white tresses; and, closer to the top, trillium grandiflora still cover the ground. Winter atop Lickstone is not for the faint of heart. The mighty, old, gnarled white oaks (*Quercus alba*)

attest to this, and they are only at this advanced date beginning to unfurl their new leaflets, while their brothers and sisters below are nearly leafed out.

As I watch from beneath the canopy of a broken overcast, the light comes and goes, moving across the face of the land, spotlighting now this section of ridge and casting into shadow that one only yards away, a contrast that serves as a primer on the topic of illumination.

Down slope from my location, by only a scant quarter of a mile, the spring is running at full tilt. There is Indian paintbrush (*Castilleja coccinea*) dripping its burnt orange hues all over an open hillside, while along the

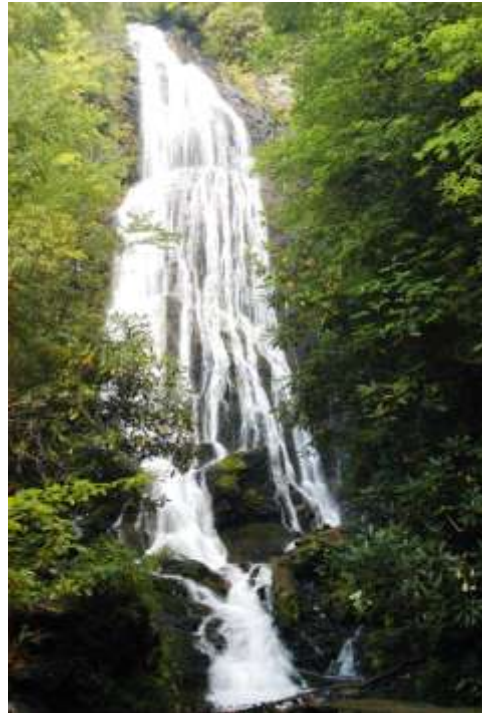


roadways golden ragwort (*Senecio aureus*) grows thickly enough to appear as if it needs to be mowed.

So many harmonies. **Gaia** is what **James Lovelock** called them collectively; honoring the ancient Greek primal Goddess of the Earth, whose union with her consort Uranus, the Sky, gave birth not only to the lakes, rivers, and seas, but also to the earliest creatures that inhabited the Earth. Lovelock's still, unfortunately, controversial hypothesis sees the Earth as a single system: a unified, self-regulating, self-sustaining whole in which the biosphere – all living things – and the Earth's physical systems – the atmosphere, cryosphere, hydrosphere, and lithosphere – integrate to form an interacting order that preserves a climatic and biogeochemical homeorhetic state. James Lovelock is a respected scientist, but if you strip away the scientific jargon, what he is saying is essentially what the

Tsalagi elders and most other First Peoples have been saying for thousands of years: It's all one.

As I look far down beyond the notch of Big Witch Gap and into the valleys at the headwaters of Bunches Creek on its way to a rendezvous with Raven Fork and the greater Oconaluftee beyond, I can see the billowing mountain of valley fog as it begins to rise in the early-morning warming drafts. Nearer at hand and more directly, but still far, below my perch, there is the faint echoing sound that can only be water moving between the steeply wooded sides of Lickstone Ridge and Jenkins Ridge: the early rushings of West Fork of Jenkins Creek. Jenkins will feed into Soco Creek, the largest tributary of the Oconaluftee that lies in a truly separate watershed; so it will not mingle with the waters of Bunches Creek until in the heart of Cherokee itself, well on the way to the Tuckasegee; but they are just as surely one now every bit as much as they will be in that coming together that will occur miles away and in a valley thousands of feet lower down. In fact, it is



only the deficiencies of my sensory apparatus that prevent me from appreciating that the fog that I see above Bunches Creek and the water that I hear in Jenkins Creek are already of a piece, the basic distinction being one of heat transfer.

Six hundred million years ago where I am standing was the bed of a shallow and relatively narrow ocean that lay surrounded by large and drifting continents of which North America and Africa were only two. We know this ocean was comparatively shallow from the rock types that are here now. Over many millions of years the continents continued to drift closer and closer, the ocean narrowed as deep-ocean trenches created places of subduction fed by great thermal convection currents far in the earth's interior, until about 200 million years ago the crustal plates carrying present-day North America

and present-day Africa crunched together in a catastrophic collision. Rock layers were folded, faulted, broken, and ultimately lifted many thousands of feet into

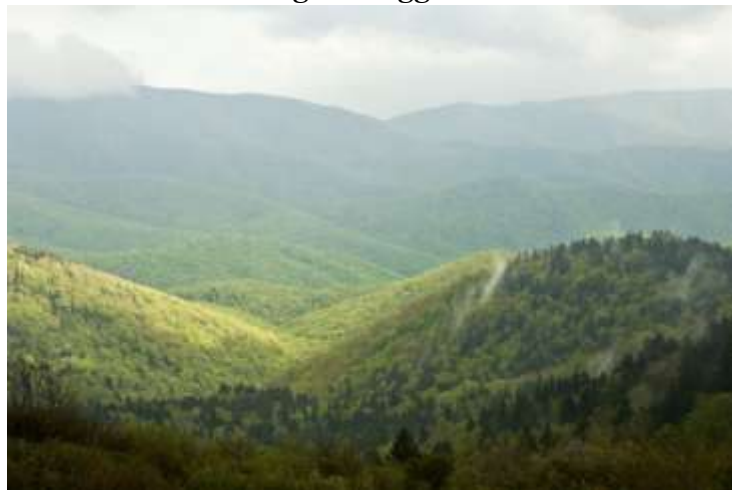
the air. We know this process today as the Appalachian orogeny – the birth of the Appalachian Mountains, and their child, the Great Smokies, that in their youth



were higher even than the mighty Himalayas of today. Eventually, again measured over a time that to the Earth is but an eye's blink, yet to us is beyond direct comprehension, the convection currents reversed and the greater land masses drifted apart leaving the Appalachians at the continental margin of North America.

So many harmonies; yet the whole of the story I have just related is but last night's dream in comparison to the real story I want to tell; and to tell it I must go back to the very beginning. For to understand where we are, we must understand where we have been, and how we have changed as our journey has progressed.

For my purpose, the beginning will be some 4.5-4.6 billion years before my standing here, on this ridge. Notice that the .1 margin I suggest amounts to some 100,000,000 years, a long yawn, at best, in the scheme of the Earth's journey, but for this story such a margin is not really material. In either case, if I am near the beginning, there is nothing else like me around to share the tale. In fact, something like me is not possible. For when the Earth was newly coalesced from the gasses, dust and other debris in the gravitational field of the



younger sun, the atmosphere that surrounded it was entirely different from the one it has now. That "air" was unstable and consisted of mostly hydrogen ( $H_2$ ) and helium (He). Last time I checked, I don't breathe either of them very well. Due to the instability of the situation most of this atmosphere was ultimately dissipated into space. During this period, volcanism was constant; early on, the surface temperature was too high for liquid water, but one of the results, over time, of this on-going out gassing was a greater accumulation of vapor in the atmosphere, along with carbon dioxide and ammonia. As Earth's surface cooled, condensation became more regular, and liquid water began to pond. Surface waters grew in volume and began to gather in mighty seas. In the air there was a

change in the density of the constituent gasses resulting in a second Earth atmosphere made up primarily of carbon dioxide and water vapor. There was a little nitrogen (N) thrown in, but hardly any free oxygen (O) at all. In time this accumulation stabilized as carbon dioxide was dissolved in the growing oceans and precipitated out as carbonates, resulting in an earth coated with a layer of carbonic materials and creating conditions more favorable for early life forms.

Indeed, by about 3.5 billion years before now early life had emerged as archaea, single-celled microorganisms which thrived in an exotic nutrient soup that included nitrogen and hydrogen, among others. Some 2.7 billion years ago the archaea discovered they were not alone; microbial entities known as cyanobacteria were present. These single-celled wonders are the first creatures known to perform oxygenic photosynthesis, taking carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and giving



back oxygen. Over half a billion years these simple organisms changed the Earth's atmosphere from an oxygen-lacking state into one that is oxygen-containing; and the Great Oxidation that resulted was the first true mass extinction, for most early life forms were oxygen intolerant and the new ones, in order to survive, had to adapt to an atmosphere that was more oxygen saturated than ever before: the Earth's third atmosphere and the one that you and I breathe every day of our lives.

By the time the sediments that were being deposited in anticipation of becoming Smokies rock layers were settling to the floor of the ancient sea, Earth's third atmosphere had been around for quite a while, even as geologic time goes. It was stable and it contained a mixture of gasses weighted heavily in favor of nitrogen (N<sub>2</sub> – 78%) and oxygen (O<sub>2</sub> – 21%), with incredibly small amounts of carbon dioxide

(CO<sub>2</sub> – 0.03%) and water vapor (H<sub>2</sub>O), and a few inert gasses as well. So as the

great rock layers began to feel the squeeze, as they found themselves rising ever higher, as they buckled and cracked and faulted, there was already in place a mechanism that remains no less essential to not only our survival as a species,



but to the survival of nearly every species of living thing on the Earth at this time.

We call this mechanism the “water cycle”.

So many harmonies. By the time the Smokies and the Balsams were bumps on the ocean floor, the water cycle – or hydrologic cycle as it is properly known – was moving water through the system in ways that were knowable and predictable,

if there had been someone around to know and predict. Cyanobacteria were there, of course, thriving in the margins of the continental shelves, taking in sunlight, converting it to sugar, and giving off oxygen. Oceans and rivers already existed; water vapor was already present in the atmosphere; there was even ice on the surface in some mass quantity by at least two billion years ago. So, all three of water’s states have been around for quite some time and for nearly that long the hydrologic cycle has been a part of their harmony with regard to each other.

Water is an incredible substance, whose wondrous nature is matched only by our marvelous capacity to take it for granted, to act toward it as if it were a



given; in fact worse: to ignore it altogether and assume that it will always be there for us. So removed have most of us become from the sources of our existence that we no longer have any sense of a direct relationship between ourselves and those sources. Food, water, clothing, and shelter have become such indirect, obtuse considerations that they are mostly abstractions rather than things we must deal with directly on a daily basis. We behave toward all of them this way to our peril, but especially so with respect to water; for water is life, as surely as  $E=MC^2$ . Statistical compilations now show that for the first time in the history of our planet more people live in urban areas – cities – rather than in rural areas. One of the outstanding significances of this fact is that most of the world’s population

now expects to turn a faucet handle and find water: instant divination; but for many of those people – already – it just isn't so. The entire **April 2010** issue of *National Geographic* was devoted to the topic of water. One of the lead stories focused on the situation in Delhi, India where it is not uncommon for people – mostly women – to spend as much as seven hours a day looking for water to cook and clean with. Much of the water that reaches the Indian sub-continent originates as snowmelt on the Tibetan Plateau to the north; so consider this: in the past eighty-seven years the East Rongbuk Glacier on the flank of Mount Everest has lost some 350 vertical feet of ice – water down the drain so to speak.

The amount of moisture – water in all of its forms – within the Earth's system has not changed appreciably over billions of years. Its constancy is a remarkable fact owing to several influences, primarily the stability of the atmosphere. However, it is also accurate to say that over geologic time gases, such as



hydrogen, which are very light, can be lost into deep space. This can lead to accelerated greenhouse effects and, moreover, can ultimately lead to water loss. Yet this is not something that you and I are likely to face. Our challenges are dire enough. The same climate changes that are effecting such noticeable alterations in things like the East Rongbuk Glacier are also ushering in large realignments in the water cycle itself. In 2007 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change posited that the water cycle, that is the movement of water through the system, will intensify over the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This does not mean that precipitation will increase across the globe. The projection is that in subtropical land areas – places already relatively dry – precipitation will decrease and increased droughts are likely. This will be especially true for the poleward margins of the subtropics, such as the

Southwestern United States. Annual precipitation is, likewise, expected to increase in areas near the equator that are already wet, as well as in the higher

latitudes. I suppose that my personal take on this is to say that it seems that lots of things about our climate – my climate here in Western North Carolina and yours wherever you are – are going to exercise themselves in some very extreme and uncertain ways over the coming period of time, and a lot of that uncertainty



will be reflected in the water cycle. Consider the winter we have just experienced here: more than twice the average annual snowfall occurred in these mountains. For the first time in my memory snow fell in December and did not melt away completely until March. Last year (2009) was one of the wettest on record; so wet that it

completely erased several years of drought that had seen water levels drop severely and even some wells having to be dug deeper in this part of the world. How can such wild, radical shifts occur so quickly? Where are the patterns of weather, of water, that I seem to recall so vividly, that were so seemingly dependable and reliable year on year, season upon season? Gone with the wind? At the present time about 70% of our fresh water is bound worldwide in ice and most of what's left is stored in aquifers which are being depleted at a rate faster than they are being replenished. At the moment the annual net world population gain is 83 million, so water demand can only be expected to increase over the

near term. With a constant amount of water on Earth, and less and less of it available as fresh, and a greater demand for what remains, you can do the math and our conclusions won't be far apart. Unless we come up with some very creative ways to use and conserve the water we have, we're going to find ourselves - not only on the planet as a whole, but right here in our own backyards as well – running in the red when it comes to that thing which we have been taking for granted for way too long.





So many harmonies. These ancient wonders, among whose peaks and valleys I live, within whose coves and forests I roam, in whose rivers and streams I find such peace and delight are not only more beautiful than I can express, they are truly blessed – blessed with an abundance of clear, sparkling water. It falls to the tune of some 77 inches per year on average across the range, less in many lower elevations and more in the high peaks. It has been this way for many millions of years, through ice ages and warming periods; even as the seemingly inconsequential act of a single cyanobacterium, chewing on molecules of carbon dioxide and spitting out bits of oxygen, could, in concert with billions of others of its kind, transform a non-descript little planet into a garden in which creatures like me could flourish, could stand on the spine of a mountain ridge born of rocks from the basement of time and listen to chipmunks telling their children to beware of the shadow overhead lest they be invited permanently to breakfast with it.



So many harmonies, and the ultimate harmony, if I am to continue here, must be the harmony I give back in my relation to this amazing place, the care and stewardship I bestow upon its treasures; its waters perhaps chief among them. I am in great admiration of the capacity of science to explore and explain the mechanisms of this marvelous world, but I try, likewise, to remember always that science cannot explain beauty; and in the end, for me, water is, more than anything else, the mirror that reflects the beauty of the Gaia's soul; and it is from that connection that my solicitousness arises.

## **What's Now?**

### **On Change and the Same**

We have today to learn to get back into accord with the wisdom of nature and realize again our brotherhood with the animals and with the water and the sea... The idea is trans-theological. It is an undefinable, inconceivable mystery, thought of as a power, that is the source and end and supporting ground of all life and being.

- **Joseph Campbell**  
*The Power of Myth*

At the beginning of April, as I was preparing for my Smokies Spring Workshop, it was clear that the season was running way behind the schedule it seemed to have

been on for the previous several years. Based on that perceived rhythmic recurrence I had set dates for workshops in Savannah and Charleston. Those dates had likewise been ahead, and although both events had been wonderfully successful, many of the flowers we had planned to find there were barely buds at the time. It was looking like the same was going to be true for the Smokies. Now, I might be forgiven for some modest inaccuracy when it comes to predicting nature's activities in other venues, but I'm supposed to know what's going on in my backyard; so I was, to say the least, somewhat concerned. The earliest flowers had come and were going away – the bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) blossoms and the hepatica (*Hepatica nobilis*), and of course the trailing arbutus (*Epigaea repens*). That was to be expected, but there were many others that should have been on their heels that were nowhere to be seen.

The blooming that had occurred had been profuse, and so there were two things I had



begun to glean from what I was seeing: the severity of the winter had, indeed, created a significant delay – a setback – in what had become, prior to this spring, an inching forward year-by-year of the cycle's arrival; and the fruits of that severity seemed to be a superabundance of blossoms for nearly every species. Equation: Excessively harsh winters=Late spring blooms + profundity of blossoms? Only Mother Nature knows for sure. Perhaps next year will yield additional clues.

Interestingly enough, in the week before the workshop started the weather warmed markedly, daytime temperatures for several consecutive days were in the 70's; and suddenly the season exploded. There were flowers everywhere. White trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*), sweet white trillium (*Trillium simile*), even yellow trillium (*Trillium luteum*) and trout lily (*Erythronium*

*umbilicatum*), and lots of others, all burst forth almost overnight. What had been a two week delay, nature erased in three days. It was incredible to watch, as it

almost seemed visible to the naked eye.

Since then, the schedule has proceeded apace and the blooming cycle at the



moment appears to be about on par with what has become the “norm”. That means that as I write this, there are some beautiful species on the verge of flowering: mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) is blooming throughout the western end of the Blue Ridge Parkway and in the lower elevations of the Smokies on the North Carolina side of the Park. The purple loveliness of Catawba rhododendron (*Rhododendron catawbiense*) will soon be making its appearance in the higher elevations, and the variably-hued delicacy of wild (flame) azalea (*Rhododendron calendulaceum*) is working its way up the slopes. I have seen them on Thomas Divide already. I would expect that by the first week in July the rosebay rhododendron (*Rhododendron maximum*) will be blooming in the lower elevations of the Park, especially along the Oconaluftee River, and shortly thereafter in the

watersheds on the Tennessee side. If events hold true to form, the rosebay bloom this year could be a spectacular one, so it is something I will keep an eye on and be ready to respond to when it occurs.

In fact, between now and the time of the next issue of “*A Song...*” at the end of August, most of the blooming season will have taken place, so I want to hit some of the highlights that you might want to take note of regarding flowers. I have already seen some early leaves of Turk’s cap lily (*Lilium superbum*), so there will probably be flowers blooming before the end of June in the lower elevations of its range. By the end of June and into the first week of July small purple-fringed orchid (*Platanthera psycodes*) will be blooming along Clingman’s Dome Road especially around Mount Collins. And yes, Clingman’s Dome Road is scheduled to be open by then. By late-July I anticipate that cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) will be in bloom along the streams on both sides of the Park. Ox-eye daisies (*Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*) are now blooming in the



fields near the Oconaluftee Visitor Center and at the Tow String Road turn-off of Newfound Gap Road (US 441). By the beginning of July they should be blooming in Cades Cove, and I am expecting an extensive display.



Those large members of the Aster family: wood tickseed (*Coreopsis major*), three-lobed Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia triloba*), coneflower (*Rudbeckia laciniata* var *humilis*), and wide-leaved sunflower (*Helianthus decapetalus*) are all usually wide-spread to begin with, and I believe this will be a banner year for all. By early July they should be blooming widely across their range, which includes most of the elevations in the Park and along the western end of the Parkway. I am hoping that this year will be an exceptional one for one of my favorite little orchids – crane-fly (*Tipularia discolor*) – which I often find along the lower end of Deep Creek Trail. I’m also going to keep my eye out for Mountain St. John’s-wort growing along Thomas Divide and Clingman’s Dome Road, also in July. These

are just a few of the species I find particularly appealing. I’m sure you have others that you are drawn to as well. Send me a note and let me know what some of them are.

It seems that I recall the spring of 2009 starting off rather dry during April and early-May, and then it began to rain in June and didn’t stop, even though July, August, and September are supposed to be the dryer months. I see some similarities with 2010. This means that the water levels in most Smokies streams are running from normal to a little high. The lowest levels seem to be in the Walker Camp Prong watershed just on the Tennessee side of Newfound Gap. Perhaps water just runs off faster in that drainage due to the steepness of the slopes. The water in Greenbrier Cove is very appealing right now with all of the wonderful rock formations and boulders in the bed of Middle Prong of Little Pigeon and Porter’s Creek. And of course Little River is always a wonderful place to make images. By now, the hues of the reflections there are taking on a decidedly green cast as the



foliage has become completely unfurled.

As I write this, Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail is still closed for repaving and there is no scheduled date for reopening other than “Summer 2010”. If Roaring Fork were accessible – and it certainly is if you are willing to hike in – I believe it



would reveal some of the finest moss-covered stream boulders there have been in the past several years, and I’m excited just thinking about getting into the lower slopes of Mount LeConte to find out. There have been some marvelous atmospheric displays already this spring, and if the water cycle continues in its

topsy-turvy fashion perhaps we can anticipate more; from thick gray overcasts to billowing towers of cumuli, and from wispy strands of cirrus to lingering morning ground fogs the weather has been putting on a show worth attending.

If you think Cataloochee is the only place to view elk, you might consider the meadows around Oconaluftee Visitor Center. There has been a small, but growing, splinter herd living in the area for several years; but over the past year it seems to have become more visible as it has grown. Early mornings and late afternoons are the best viewing times, but I have seen individuals, pairs, and even small groups in the area at nearly any hour, especially when it’s not too warm in the valley. Of course, Cataloochee is the place where you have a much better chance not only of seeing them, period; but seeing them in numbers as well. The bulls are currently wearing velvet covered racks that are impressive indeed. Maybe one day they’ll remove all of the “jewelry” and the Smokies elk will become truly creatures worthy of art.

June, July, and August are months offering excellent opportunities for sunrise and sunset both in the Park and along the western-most



section of the Parkway. Even though Clingman’s Dome Road is currently closed, it is scheduled for reopening on June 18, just in time for the solstice; and

although Clingman's is not a great sunset opportunity in June, July, or early-August, by mid-August the ball of the sun has reappeared from behind the Smokies Crest and is once again a potential element. However, the east end of the parking lot at Clingman's is an excellent sunrise opportunity not only right now; but it will remain so for the remainder of the season, as it will reach its far leftward drift on June 21 and then begin its return across the Deep Creek watershed and around toward Fontana and the Yellow Creek Mountains beyond.



Luftee Overlook, on the other hand, is not the best sunrise location at present. The solar disc has moved far to the left

and behind the flank of the Smokies Crest so that it is not a potential element; but Luftee can always be a place for wonderful color in the sky as well as clouds, mist, and fog in the valley below. The contrast between the foliage of the dark green firs and the lighter hardwoods around Luftee make it always worth considering.

Morton Overlook is, at the moment, at its prime as a sunset location and offers the quintessential image of the end of a Smokies day. The sun is nearly directly over the lower valley of West Prong of Little Pigeon; and when the elements combine just so, there is not a more beautiful sunset location on the planet.

Lickstone Ridge Overlook between Mile Markers 459-460 on the Parkway is also



an excellent sunset location at present and can be a worthwhile alternative to Morton Overlook – without the crowd.

Sunrise/sunset times from June 1 – August 31:

**June 1 – June 21:**

Sunrise – 6:19~6:18 a.m.

Sunset – 8:43~8:53 p.m.

**June 22 – June 30:**

Sunrise – 6:18~6:21 a.m.

Sunset – 8:53~8:53 p.m.

**July 1 – July 31:** Sunrise – 6:21~6:40 a.m.; Sunset – 8:53~8:40 p.m.

**August 1 – August 31:** Sunrise – 6:41~7:04 a.m.; Sunset – 8:39~8:04 p.m.

These times are for Gatlinburg and will not vary significantly throughout the Park, or along the western end of the Parkway.



Sometimes when I am in the Smokies' high country, looking out at all of those folded ridges rolling away into eternity, I try to imagine that I have eyes that see in geological time, and I watch as the earth evolves before me. I remember as a grade school student looking at my first map of the globe of the Earth and thinking – of Africa and South America – with the naïve mind of the beginner: Surely they must have been connected at one time; how could they not have been. That must have been the first moment when some vague notion went through me that the Earth might be more than some fixed ball of rock floating in space. It would be another decade, or so, before a forward thinking geology professor would introduce me to the idea of the then still-controversial concept of plate tectonics, and

in the process open my eyes to the reality of a dynamic planet, ever-changing even as it continues to look so much the same. By the time I was in law school **James Lovelock** was beginning to publish his thoughts on Gaia, and **Lewis Thomas** was talking about individual living cells as if they were microcosmic replicas of an earth that was itself very much alive. Of course, every Native American elder whose words ever reached my ears said the same thing, so science and spirit seemed naturally to come together and where reconciliation between them seemed impossible, I came to assume that the impossibility lay with my shortcomings rather than with either of them.

As I look outward, these old hills seem to settle into the depths of the earth, to disappear completely as if gone forever and then to rise before me in a majesty that is breathtaking; and forty years on it is still the best notion I can conjure: that more than anything else, they are alive, more than anything else their individual systems, their discrete bits and pieces, form a collective whole whose will to survive will long outlast anything we humans do to



their detriment. As I look outward at them, they seem more and more to entice me to look within.

## **A Tip is Worth...?**

### **A Little Bit on the Fussy Side**

A Lakota woman named Elaine Jahner once wrote that what lies at the heart of the religion of hunting peoples is the notion that a spiritual landscape exists within the physical landscape. To put it another way, occasionally one sees something fleeting in the land, a moment when line, color, and movement intensify and something sacred is revealed, leading one to believe that there is another realm of reality corresponding to the physical one but different.

**Barry Lopez**  
*Arctic Dreams*

“To paint is not to copy the object slavishly, it is to grasp a harmony among many relationships.” – Paul Cézanne

To grasp a harmony among many relationships; as with Cézanne’s observation of what it means to paint, to comprehend this may truly be said to be the ultimate thrust of what it means to photograph. And what is harmony, after all, but a set of dynamic tensions. If you think of harmony only as a serenity and peacefulness you may miss it altogether, for harmony just as surely lies in the infinitely small space between the fang of the wolf and soft fur of the deer’s flank, between the burden of the soil’s weight and the sprouting of the new seed, between the aged bull moose and the strength-sapping, biting cold of the winter wind that will take his last breath away. Harmony is, indeed, a moving set of relationships that ebb and flow, coming ultimately to rest for a brief moment in a balance, a still point, where oneness is sensed, recognized, and felt in the depth of being.

To photograph that harmony is to sense the moment when the dynamic tensions have come together in that balance and are temporarily resolved. It may be the simple curve of a flower’s petal and the strength of its line, or the multi-layered rhythm of a wide-angle landscape with foreground, mid-ground and background finely posed; it might be the lines and shapes of an intimate landscape come together so that their conversation among themselves speaks to a connectedness that is plain





and clear, or the graphics of a telephoto image that pulls disparate elements into close arrangement and makes all else irrelevant. Each focal length range has its own particular way of seeing the harmony, but it is my inner eye as an artist that must first find the vision to express it.

The path of my life and the path of my photography are parallel lines running together. They are inseparable. They require the same commitment to learning and to growth – being a whole and complete person and being a whole and complete artist; one cannot go forward without taking the other along; and the longer I continue on the journeys of each, the more acutely I understand their oneness.

In the beginning my images recorded the world around me. They were snapshots of my movement along the path. At best they were straightforward recitations of my experience; interesting, but little more. Somewhere along the way my ability to manipulate the various components of craft – the mechanical and technical aspects of the process – which



came only after hours and hours, and days and weeks and months of practice and more practice, allowed me to go beyond records and snapshots and to imbue my images with feeling and emotion, to express the interior landscape of what I saw on the journey in a way that gave to those who saw the work a reaction that was parallel to my experience in creating it. Feeling follows feeling.

The realization that I had achieved this level of expression was an exciting self-discovery, but it was not an end, but rather just a way point, a marker. For eventually I discovered that the more I took myself – my self – out of the way and allowed the world beyond my bundle of sensory impressions to say what it would, when it would, where it would and how, the more my images came to express the essence of what that world was trying to communicate. The more I stopped trying to find them, the more willing they were to

reveal themselves to me. In the silence of stillness, the harmony is reflected back in an infinity of kaleidoscopic forms and all that I must do is connect with them.

In that connection harmony becomes imagery.

This is in no way New Ageian psychobabble. It is descriptive of a very real

creative process in photography that takes place when we stop trying to control everything and become part of it instead.

When we allow this to happen, we come to see ourselves as a small piece of the larger whole: different and unique, and yet not – merely an alternate expression of the sameness that is all. When we see that harmony lies in those contradictions and contrasts, then our path through creativity becomes a reflection of that, and harmony becomes what we are.

I say all of this because when this is the way we approach our work – the creative process – we become somewhat fussy about what we do. We take the time to learn the components of our craft so well that they do, in fact, become second nature. We take the time to learn how our equipment works to our best advantage, so that our use of it becomes so secondary to the process that we

are not encumbered by it in any way. We take the time to become familiar with our subjects so that our expression of them reflects a deep understanding of and connectedness with what they have to say to us. We do all of these things and we practice them again and again, so that our creativity comes to express the deepest understanding we have of the beauty that lies within us. And if it takes fussiness to achieve this, then we embrace fussiness.



## **As for EarthSong...**

### **Walking in Beauty**

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**

It is truly incredible to think that nearly half of 2010 has passed. It has been exciting beyond words; so much has happened, and yet there's still another

half to look forward to with anticipation. Perhaps the biggest news is that the **2011 Workshop Schedule** and the **2010 One-day Workshop Schedule** have both been posted to the website, [www.EarthSongPhotography.com](http://www.EarthSongPhotography.com).

I am very pleased with the choices of places we'll be visiting for the weeklong events; some are places we visit often and some places we haven't visited for a while, but all of whose beauty is awesome and whose photographic experiences are wonderful. To access the schedule go to the Home Page and click on the "Workshops" tab at the top of the page. When the page comes up, go to the left hand column and click on "2011" at the top of the column. You can scroll down the workshop selections and click on any. Doing this will open up that workshop's description on the right side of the page.

For the 2010 One-day Schedule, go to the Home Page and click on the



"Instruction & Art" tab at the top of the page. In the drop-down menu select "One-day Workshops" and click. For additional information about any of the workshops please contact me at [don@earthsongphotography.com](mailto:don@earthsongphotography.com). The new workshop year will be here before you know it.

There are two events coming up immediately that I am very excited about. The first is the annual Grandfather Mountain (NC) Nature Photography Weekend, June 4-6. This event, initiated by Grandfather Mountain's celebrated owner Hugh Morton, has been held for many years and brings in participants from across the country and around the world. I am thrilled to be offering one of the presentations this year. I'll be doing the second of the Sunday morning programs. Perhaps I'll reflect on Charles Kuralt and the many years I spent

watching him about that same time, or perhaps I'll talk about being fussy. Anyway, I'm really looking forward to being there again and hope to see some of

you there, too.

The second event, that follows two weeks after Grandfather Mountain, is a weekend workshop I'm doing for a group of image enthusiasts in Western Massachusetts' Pioneer Valley. This event will feature one of my "Fussy Photographer" programs which I am really excited about. I have very much enjoyed creating the ideas and structure for this program and it has been well-received wherever I have given it.



This will also be an opportunity to spend some time with our good friends Judy and Bill Cummings and catch up on the bucolic lives of Massachusetts equestrian farmers. If you read this and want to know more about the "Fussy Photographer" program, just send me a note, [don@earthsonphotography.com](mailto:don@earthsonphotography.com).

There are two of 2010's weeklong workshops that I want to highlight. These events are in two of my very favorite locations for fall photography, and over the many years I have photographed in them my love of their great beauty has constantly deepened and grown richer every time I am there.

First there is **Michigan's Upper Peninsula Fall Workshop; Hancock and Munising, Michigan; September 26-**



**October 2.** There are still spaces in this workshop, and that means there's still time for you to get ready to experience what I consider to be the best fall foliage in the country. The UP is a marvelous location of awesome hardwood and conifer forests, of beautiful rushing waters

and roaring waterfalls, of rock covered beaches looking out onto the greatest of the Great Lakes, Kitchi Gami. Names like Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State

Park, the Keweenaw Peninsula, Ottawa National Forest, Bond Falls, Hiawatha National Forest, and Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore bring to mind magical lands and sacred spaces, and images you will never forget.

This is also the workshop for 2010 that I'll be doing with my good friend Kendall Chiles, with whom I have shared many memorable adventures over the years and with whom I very much enjoy working as a workshop co-leader.

You can find the workshop on the website under "Workshops" then click on "2010" and scroll down to "Upper Peninsula". There's a printable registration form available by clicking at the bottom of the column on "Registration Form".

The second workshop of the fall season is the **Acadia National Park/Mount Desert Island Workshop;**

**Southwest Harbor, Maine; October 9-15.**

As many of you know, Acadia and Mount Desert Island are places I visit both in the spring and in the fall, and the reason is simple – I love lobster – no, not quite; I have fallen in love with the Maine Coast because



I think it is one of the most special places on earth. It is a land of great northern forest communities and granite mountains looming above the shore, of booming surf and quiescent ponds. It is a place where light and water and rock dance together in a timeless waltz, where the sea and the land join hands and become one. (And the seafood isn't bad either.)

Mount Desert Island is also a place of quiet harbors where men and women still work hard to craft a living, as have generations of hardy New Englanders before them, from the sea, and their activities and settings make for rewarding imagery.

The coast of Maine is where Eliot Porter came to create some of his most enduring images that sealed his fame as one of the great intimate landscape photographers of all time, and I'd swear there are moments when I fully believe I have felt his presence in the

land as I have wandered across it. It is a timeless experience that will remain in

your heart for the rest of your life. There are still openings in this workshop as well. For more on this workshop go to the website, [www.EarthSongPhotography.com](http://www.EarthSongPhotography.com), click on the “Workshops” tab at the top of the Home Page, then look to the left hand column of the page and click on “2010”. Scroll down to “Acadia/Mount Desert Island” and click. The workshop description will come up on the right side of the page. And there is always a registration form to be had by clicking on “Registration Form” at the bottom of the column.

We’d love for you to join us on one of these adventures. If you have any questions or would like additional information about any of them, please contact me at [don@earthsongphotography.com](mailto:don@earthsongphotography.com), or **(828) 788-0687**.

Until next time, may the Spirit of Light guide your shutter release

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Early Light, Purchase Knob