

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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Travelin' Man

The attention of a traveler should be particularly turned, in the first place, to the various works of Nature, to mark the distinctions of the climate he may explore, and to offer such useful observations on the different productions as may occur. Men and manners undoubtedly hold the first rank – whatever may contribute to our existence is also of equal importance, whether it be found in the animal or vegetable kingdom; neither are the various articles, which tend to promote the happiness and convenience of mankind, to be disregarded.

William Bartram
from the Introduction to *Travels*

It would be difficult to know – in fact, impossible at this point in time – what may really have been going through his mind at that precise moment as he watched the riders quickly descending the trail toward where he now stood. Was it excitement, anticipation, fear, perhaps; or maybe a little of all of these emotions in some kaleidoscopically changing proportion? Possibly, whichever the feelings were, they were tinged by a deep and abiding faith in a power greater than himself, which manifested good will throughout the universe and would, therefore, see him through whatever the riders might bring his way. Two things



seemed certain: whoever they were, they were Indians; and the man at the head of their band was, from all appearances, an important person. A very short time would tell, and he was always on good terms with time; perhaps because he never gave it too much thought. When he would later set out his account of this day, it would be dated a year later than it actually occurred. Yet for whatever lack of sidereal attention he may be charged, his other powers of observation were sharply intact, and in our gratitude for that, we acknowledge him as what he was: the first great American naturalist (of European descent), whose wanderlust gave us a nearly encyclopedic detailing of the much greater part of the southeastern portion of our country at the precise moment in time that world was on the verge of forever changing and would soon be gone. The day was May 24, 1775.

The night before, **William Bartram**, age 36 at the time, had slept in a high valley somewhere, likely, between Burningtown



Old Oak, Nantahala River

Gap **Old Apple Orchard, Burningtown Gap** on the crest of the Nantahala Mountains and the steep gorge of the Nantahala River, flowing in a great arc somewhere to the west, north, and ultimately northeast of him before joining its tumbling, foaming waters with those of the Little Tennessee.

Since rising with the morning, he had taken his horse some eight or ten miles to the northwest along a branch of the Overhill Path, finally reaching the river near where Forest Service Road 422 now crosses on an old steel bridge, and fording it in a shallow bottom, downstream from the mouth of the precipitous upper gorge. And there he stood his horse and waited as the band of warriors came on.

As a courtesy, Bartram turned his mount off the path to allow the group to pass. When they reached him, they slowed and the leader approached to introduce himself. It was, as Bartram had surmised, no less than **Ata-gul'kalu (Attakullakulla)**, who

though in his 60's was yet an impressive personage. Ata-gul'kalu, known as Little Carpenter, had been one of the principal leaders of the Ani-Yunwiya in the time between the French and Indian Wars and the American Revolution. His son,

Tsiyu Gansini

(Dragging Canoe), with whom he ultimately came to strongly disagree over the direction of Tsalagi-White relations, is still considered by many to be the greatest Native American leader of the Pre-Revolutionary Period in the Southeast.

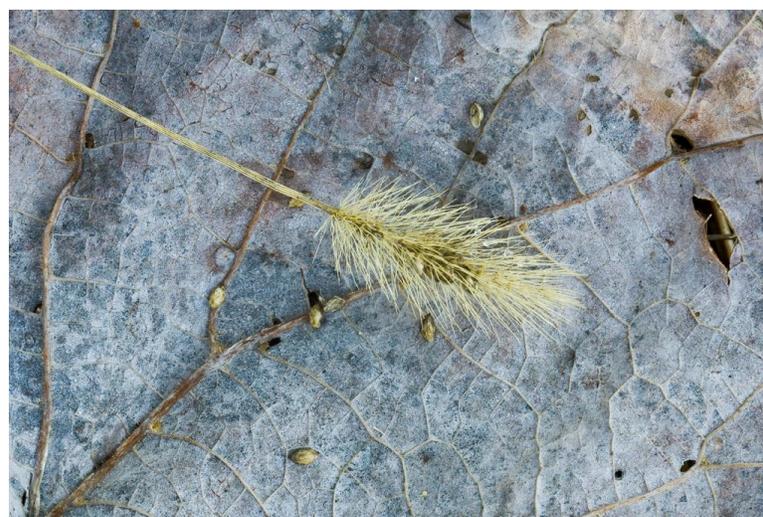
Ata-gul'kalu was a renowned orator, but his influence came through being the nephew of the esteemed leader and chief,

Connecorte (Old Hop). Like Bartram, Ata-gul'kalu was slight of build and not exceedingly tall, so perhaps their similarity in size attracted them to each other favorably.

In their brief encounter, they apparently spoke pleasantly to each other, during which Ata-gul'kalu asked if Bartram had recently come from Charleston; and, after replying affirmatively, Bartram indicated he had come on "a friendly visit to



Patton's Run, Nantahala River



Sycamore Leaf and Seed Head, Nantahala Gorge

the Cherokee", to which the response was that he was welcome in the land of the Tsalagi as a friend and a brother.

Following their leave from each other, Bartram continued northward crossing several ridges and possibly reaching, finally, the peak now called Cheoah Bald in a small range known as the Cheoah Mountains, located between the Snowbirds to the south

and west and the majesty of the Great Smokies to the north and east.

Here, though he had intended to continue on to visit the Cherokee Overhill Towns in the valleys near the mouth of the Little Tennessee and despite the welcoming words of the great chief, Bartram, in a moment of reflective reconsideration, determined to turn around and return to the White settlements

to the south from whence he had come.

Once again, we cannot know his mind, but what we do know is that in March of 1775, Ata-gul'kalu and a group of elder chiefs, including **Oconostota (Aganstata)**, had sold twenty million acres to North Carolinians as part of the **Treaty of Sycamore Shoals**. Dragging Canoe and the younger warriors had been enraged. In his speech to the council Tsiyu Gansini had said, "Whole Indian nations have melted away like snowballs in the sun before the white man's advance. They leave scarcely a name of our people except those wrongly recorded by their destroyers. Where are the Delawares? They have been reduced to a mere shadow of their former greatness. We had hoped that the white men would not be willing to travel beyond the mountains. Now that hope is gone. They have passed the mountains and have settled upon Cherokee land. They wish to have that action sanctioned by treaty. When that is gained, that same encroaching spirit will lead them upon other land of the Cherokees. New cessions will be asked.

Finally the whole country, which the Cherokees and their fathers have so long occupied, will be demanded and the remnant of Ani-Yunwiya, The Real People, once so great and formidable, will be compelled to seek refuge in some distant wilderness. There they will be permitted to stay only a short while until they again behold the advancing banners of the same greedy host. Not being able to point out any further retreat for the miserable Cherokees, the extinction of the whole race will be



Late Afternoon, Clingman's Dome

proclaimed. Should we not, therefore, run all risks and incur all consequences, rather than submit to further loss of our country? Such treaties may be alright for men who are too old to hunt or fight. As for me, I have my young warriors about me. We will have our lands. A-Waninski, I have spoken."

The resulting discord had sent shudders through the land of the Ani-Yunwiya, and Dragging Canoe's hostility was known and felt among the settlements. In the midst of this, even the most respectful and amiable of whites might have cause to be concerned. William Bartram apparently understood discretion as the greater part of valor and decided to forego the Overhills for the present moment, but he had already seen and learned much on this portion of his journey; and this adventure would serve him well in the greater story of things.

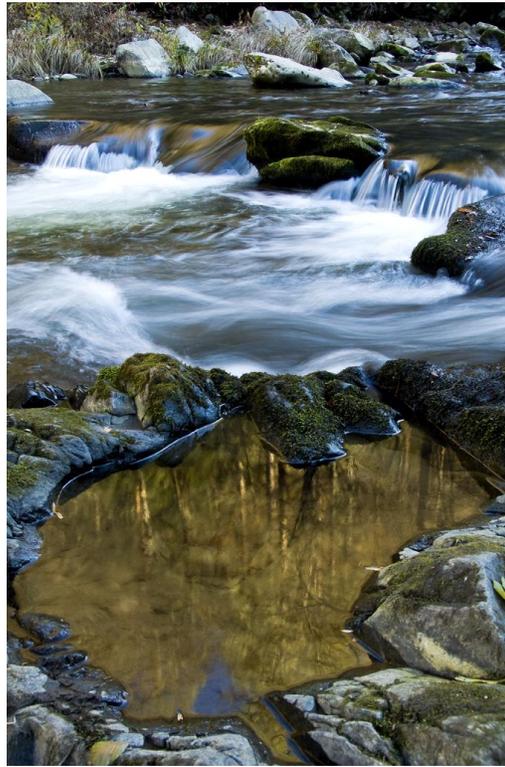
When William Bartram was twelve years old he lost eleven days of his life overnight, and his birthday – and that of his twin sister **Elizabeth** – was changed for posterity. The day they were born in Kingsessing on the Schuylkill

River west of Philadelphia in 1739 was listed as “2mo.9” meaning the ninth day of the second month. Rather than referring to February 9, it actually indicated the old Quaker calendar, by which the second month was April. When, on September 2, 1752, the old Julian calendar was replaced by the Gregorian menology, the next day became September 14; and William and Elizabeth instantly became birth celebrants of April 20. Imagine how the Leap Year birth children must have felt. William’s ambivalence toward time may well have stemmed from such confusion, or it may just have been his natural inclination.

William Bartram was the third of five sons, along with four daughters, born to **John** and **Ann Mendenhall Bartram** (John’s first wife, **Mary Maris**, with whom he had two sons, had died in 1727, and he had married Ann in 1729). In the same year as Bartram’s birth, **Benjamin Franklin** and several associates founded the

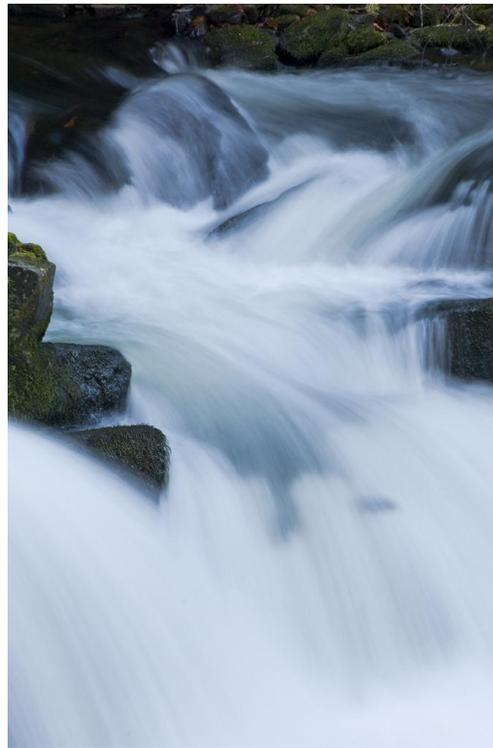
Philadelphia Academy as the first secular college in North America and the first to offer a liberal arts education. Forty years on it would become the University of Pennsylvania. By the time he was born, his father was becoming known as one of the pre-eminent botanists in the colonies. John was the first of European descent to discover here what we now know as American ginseng, growing on the Susquehanna River. He had already traveled extensively throughout New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia searching for plants and seeds; and although he considered himself but a simple farmer, he was fast gaining a reputation as an expert in such matters. By 1765, his esteem as a plant scientist would be so widespread that he would be appointed by **George III** to the post of King’s Botanist for North America, a position he would hold for the remainder of his life. No less august a person than **Carolus Linnaeus** would describe him as the “greatest natural botanist in the world.”

The family into which William and Elizabeth were born on that tentative day of 2mo.9 were devout Quakers, or more properly, the Religious Society of Friends. It had been only seventeen years before John’s birth in the village of Darby that **William Penn** had founded the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as a place where members of the faith might practice their beliefs in peace and security: such radical notions as the literal interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount and a direct experience of the eternal Christ without the mediation of clergy; the tenet that one’s “testimony” is best expressed by one’s actions and the way one goes about living one’s life. It was the Friends odd notion that all “men” are, in fact,



**Pothole Reflection, Upper Gorge
Nantahala River**

brothers and deserve to be treated with equal respect and dignity – including the Red Men who had quickly been discounted by most colonists as savages and heathens. John’s family had been among that initial wave of Friends seeking sanctuary in the new colony in a New World, and the tenets of the Society had been well-instilled into the young scientist-farmer who, in turn, passed them to his eleven children. From what we know, they took full purchase in William, even if his father’s more regimented notions of time did not. Ironically, it should be mentioned that in 1758, John was removed from membership in the Darby Meeting of Friends because he refused to acknowledge the divinity of Jesus, even though he continued to attend meetings for the rest of his life. In the same year that he was twelve and time was stood on its head by the establishment of the Gregorian calendar as the standard demarcation of days, William entered the Philadelphia Academy; but his



Cataract, Upper Gorge, Nantahala River



Cataract, Upper Gorge, Nantahala River

formal schooling was not to be of lengthy duration, because the next year, in September 1753, he accompanied his father on a trip to the Catskills in New York to gather plants and seeds. In 1754, they returned to the Catskills, where, on that occasion, they met **Dr. Alexander Garden**, recently arrived from Charleston to assume a professorship at **King’s College**, which we know today as Columbia University. Dr. Garden was an eminent physician, botanist, and zoologist who had introduced into medical usage pink root (Indian pink, *Spigelia marilandica*) for intestinal parasites. Named in his honor is the fragrant beauty, Gardenia; and though he would later side with the Loyalists against the patriot cause, he is remembered as an important figure in early-American botanical endeavors.

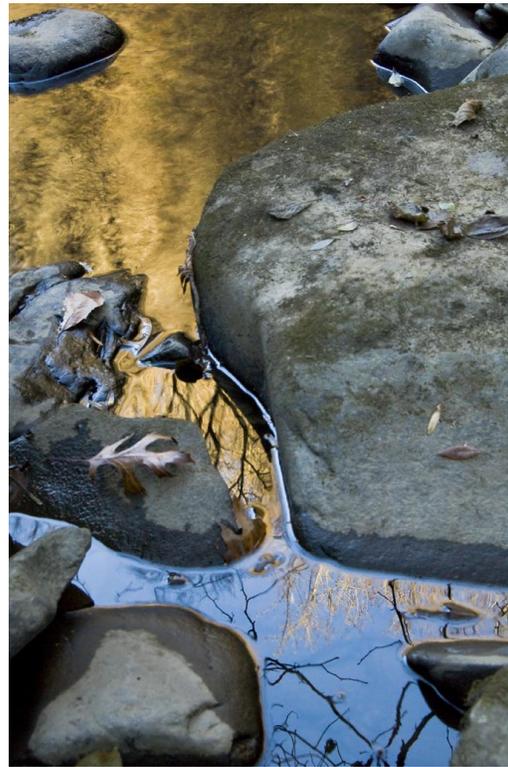
By this time, John Bartram appears to be having some concerns as to the direction of his son’s future. Two proffered apprenticeships, one by no less than Benjamin

Franklin as a printer's helper and the other by Dr. Garden as a physician's assistant, are both declined. In the first case it was John's feeling that the vocation was, too often, not profitable, nor did William have any interest; and in the second John felt that William's only real interest lay in the botanical aspects of the work.

From an early age William had, indeed, shown real affinity for botany and a fine talent for drawing. He had been exposed, as a boy, to the best scientific minds of the day – a list that would read like a Who's Who of Colonial America. Perhaps it was the volume of **Mark Catesby's** *Natural History of Carolina* in his father's library that had fanned the flames of this passion; or perhaps it was just some natural bent. Catesby had been one of the first naturalists-artists to combine both plant and animal drawings in association with each other. He himself had given John Bartram the book, which was the first published account of the flora and fauna of North America.

In the summer of 1755, following the rejection of the apprenticeships, William's drawings were shared by John with **Peter Collinson**, a notable Fellow of the Royal Society in London, friend, and middleman for John's botanical endeavors both in Great Britain and elsewhere. Collinson in turn showed the drawings to a wide audience of his correspondents, including Linnaeus, **Dr. John Fothergill**, and the well-known botanical artist **C.D. Ehret**. Continuing in his effort to steer William toward a suitable avocation, John urged surveying; his friend Collinson suggested engraving. In 1756, however, William confounded everyone's expectations and entered into the path of the one career for which he was probably least suited of all. He apprenticed himself to **James Child**, a Philadelphia merchant and began the occupation of businessman.

Of this period in his life there seems to be little record, but in 1761, now twenty-two years old, William sets out for North Carolina with the mind to operate a store at Ashwood, the plantation of his beloved uncle **William Bartram II** (Our William is actually William Bartram III), located on the Cape Fear River between Elizabethtown and Brunswick. Had he been successful at this endeavor our natural history of this part of the country might have been very different. As it turned out, things did not go very well; and in 1765 John writes his son of his appointment as the King's Botanist and of his upcoming trip to explore the new territory of East Florida, which Britain had received from Spain at the conclusion of the French and Indian Wars through the Treaty of Paris. In this writing John



**Reflection, Upper Gorge
Nantahala River**

invites William to accompany him on the adventure, advising the young man to settle his business affairs at Ashwood and to prepare for the trip. Collecting William at the plantation, the pair head to the coast at Brunswick in order to take the King's Road south to Charleston.

So it was that between July 1765 and March 1767, the father and son tandem carved a sinuous route for themselves, especially once they crossed the Savannah River from South Carolina into Georgia. On September 20, 1765, they at last departed Savannah for East Florida and the new colony of New Smyrna, then being mapped out. On the way they explored the Georgia coastal plain and in particular the lower Altamaha River floodplain. Here, among others, they discovered a new species of tree which they named *Franklinia alatahama* in honor of John's good friend Ben Franklin. Mid-October found them in Saint Augustine where they remained until mid-November, since shortly after their arrival John had contracted malaria.

In December, the Bartrams began their trek up the St. John's River, and on January 12 of the new year they reached their farthest point south near the river's headwaters west of present-day Titusville, where it splits into an array of reed-choked branches. The next day they started back downriver. Near Silver Glen Springs on January 24, William discovered *Illicium floridanum* whose lovely purple flowers belie a pungent aroma that gives rise to its common name, stink



Tulip Poplar Leaf, Nantahala Gorge

bush, because of its live fish odor. By mid-February John and William were back in Saint Augustine. The trip had, as is said in the South, ruined the younger Bartram for any further career in business; however, in a decision that surely left his father scratching his head, William declared that he now planned to take a land grant and remain in Florida as a planter. It was only late-summer by the time William sold his interests – which by general consensus were already headed toward failure – and went to work as an assistant surveyor to **William De Brahm** mapping out the lines of New Smyrna. Then, in December, William was shipwrecked off New Smyrna Beach and for several months his circumstances were unknown to his family until, in April, word reached Philadelphia that he was safe. That same summer he returned to Pennsylvania where he briefly worked as a farm laborer before returning again to the mercantile business. It was during this period, when nothing seemed to be working out in William's occupational life, that Dr. John Fothergill became familiar with the young Bartram's natural history and botanical drawings.

Fothergill, Peter Collinson, and others began paying him commissions for these works, and, on the brighter side of things, his father was elected, in 1769, to membership in the **Royal Academy of Sciences** in Stockholm.

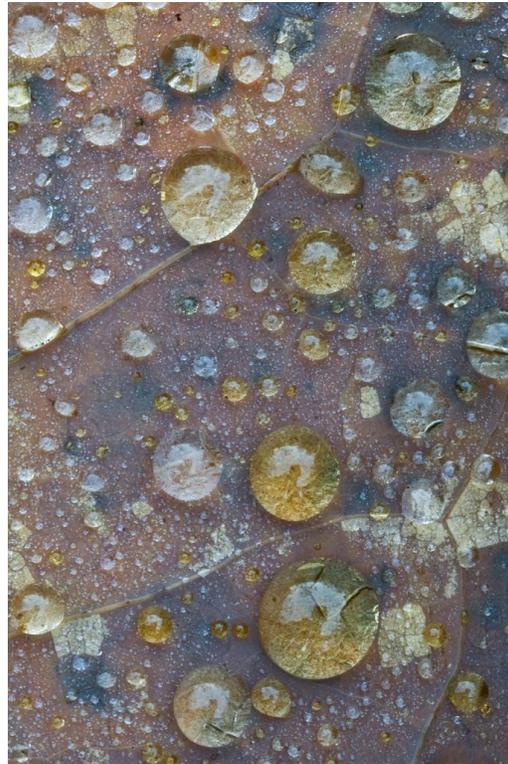
Misfortune, however, was not yet quite ready to loosen its grip on his affairs. In September 1770, he was threatened by a creditor and before anyone knew what had happened, he disappeared from Philadelphia. Again several months would pass before his family would learn from North Carolina that he had reappeared at William II's plantation at Ashwood. While Bartram was there, his dear uncle and aunt would both pass away leaving a hole in the firmament of his close relations that he would feel very deeply; but it was in this darkness that a light suddenly appeared.

Dr. Fothergill, who by this time had replaced the deceased Peter Collinson as John Bartram's liaison in London, proposed that William undertake for him another expedition to Florida to collect plants and seeds, and to make drawings. It seems quite apparent that convincing Bartram to sign on to this task was not a difficult matter. Over the winter of

1772-73 William returned to Philadelphia for the purpose of preparing for the journey. In addition to his expenses and payment for his drawings, he was to be paid the sum of £50 per year, about \$75 in current value, but a middle-class standard of living in the late 1700's.

On March 20, 1773 William Bartram left the City of Brotherly Love, arriving in Charleston on March 31. Between that date and January 2, 1777, when he arrived back in Philadelphia, he traveled some 2,500 miles on a trek that took him through parts of seven modern states of the American South. His footsteps took him through the closing days of Colonial America and into the opening events of the American Revolution, the creation of an entirely new country. As he traveled, the very ground under his feet might be subject to shifting allegiances and changing fortunes in the uncertainties of impending war. Always, he offered his observations on nature and science in a straightforward personal way such that no one before him had done, in a style and tone that would set the standard for generations of naturalists that came afterward. His sensitive nature and inquisitive intellect conspired to make of the entire natural world one great laboratory for his investigation.

Often and for extended periods of time he traveled alone, on foot, on horseback, or by boat, and in the face of all the perils with which the wilderness was fraught. He lived among the Seminoles in Florida, and he visited with the Cherokees in



Tulip Poplar Leaf, Nantahala Gorge

North Carolina and the Creeks in Georgia and present-day Alabama. His descriptions of their history and culture still serve as invaluable resources for ethnologists and anthropologists. Since he had no ulterior motive in being among them other than observing and learning what they knew, he was welcomed in their midst on their own terms. William's mentor during his days at the Philadelphia Academy had been **Charles Thomson**, who went on to become the Secretary of the Continental Congress and also co-designer of the Great Seal of the United States. Thomson was an adopted member of the **Delaware Tribe**, whose Indian name translated as "Truth Teller" because of his integrity in dealing with Native Americans. Thomson's attitudes were, no doubt, in large measure, responsible –along with William's Quaker beliefs and inherited temperament – for Bartram's enlightened outlook; and his writings would serve as early refutation of the notion that Indian life and culture was primitive or simplistic. He also visited with the most well-known, learned, and important white people living in those parts of North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida where he traveled. People everywhere he went were friendly to him and helped him in his researches. He

sojourned among governors and generals, politicians and statesmen, the wealthy as well as the working class. It is a mark of his character and nature that, even in the midst of the heightened tensions of the time, he could remain on friendly personal terms with such diverse and philosophically



antagonistic personalities as the loyalist **Alexander Cameron** and the deeply patriotic **George Galphin**, spending time on his journeys at the homes of both. Galphin, no less, is credited with keeping the Creeks from forming an alliance with the British during the Revolutionary War; while Cameron was charged in a British plot to incite the Cherokees against the American colonists. Bartram spoke highly of each, though they were bitter enemies to each other.

While most of his contemporaries took a much more utilitarian view, Bartram spoke with a poet's voice of the deep admiration and affection he held for nature's beauty. He was unabashedly sincere in his synthesis of literary and scientific language in his observations and descriptions, and because of this his writings are accessible to both scientist and layman alike. This almost childlike openness to whatever nature might offer him, surely allowed him to see the world around him with eyes for details that others might easily overlook.

When William returned to Philadelphia in January 1777, he arrived in time to

spend several months with his father before John's death in September. The latter was deeply pleased at his son's return and reveled in the younger man's descriptions of his adventures.

It is, indeed, an interesting curiosity to note that upon his return to Philadelphia, Bartram remained within its environs for the balance of his days and never chose to travel far from it even though invited to do so. It took him fourteen years – despite having a draft prepared as early as 1783 – to bring *Travels* to publication in 1791, that being the primary reason the credit for discovering so many of the plants first described by Bartram went to other botanists and scientists. When the book did ultimately make its appearance, the fame it brought Bartram was instantaneous in both America and Europe, and his accomplishments immediately made him the elder statesman of American naturalists.

During all those years he led a quiet life working for his brother Johnny who had assumed ownership and management of the Bartram Garden begun by their father. Upon Johnny's passing, the garden went to his daughter Ann and her husband Robert Carr. William continued with his work there, conducting his efforts on behalf of his

niece. In the midst of the hammering out of the document that became the Constitution of the United States of America in Philadelphia in 1787, William received visits from the likes of such luminaries as **James Madison, George Mason, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson**. It was Jefferson who came to hold a special affection



Early Light, Purchase Knob

for William and communicated with him throughout the remainder of his life. Jefferson even issued Bartram an invitation to accompany one of the early explorations to the West; the same being politely acknowledged and declined. Bartram seemed content to remain where he was. On July 22, 1823, only steps from where he had just completed a description of a plant in his office at Bartram Garden, as he made his way to the plants he loved, a blood vessel burst in his head and William Bartram, traveler par excellence, one of the natural world's gentlest and greatest souls was gone.

I have tried hard to consider what it is that I might hope to glean from a study of the trappings of such a life; and it seems to come down, somehow, to this: We live in times oddly reminiscent of those in which William Bartram walked. The world around us seems to be sitting on the verge of great changes. There seems to be much uncertainty, acrimony, and recrimination on all sides and a deep division as to how best to find a way forward. I look at William Bartram and I see a life of

considered reflection, of gentle curiosity and open-mindedness; prone to listen first rather than to judge; prone to notice similarity over and above an embracing of difference; prone to look for ways to integrate rather than to separate. Maybe those are the lessons of a lifetime spent, at least in part, out on the open road; and, if that be so, maybe it is wise that we all seek to become travelers.

What's Now?

The Winter of My Content

In autumn one is not confused by activity and green leaves. The underlying apparatus, the hooks, needles, stalks, wires, suction cups, thin pipes, and iridescent bladders are all exposed in a gigantic dissection. There are the essentials. Do not be deceived simply because life has flown out of them. It will return, but in the meantime there is an unparalleled opportunity to examine in sharp and beautiful angularity the shape of life without its disturbing muddle of juices and leaves.

Loren Eisley
from *The Immense Journey*

And so the cycle has come 'round once again to the cusp of winter. Fall in these venerable old mountains is always a grand experiment in probability: how will the temperature begin to change and by what degree and when, what moisture will there be and in what form, how will the colors change and in what progression, when will the trees at last become bare? In this respect, each and every cycle is the same; and in just the same respect, each and every one is different – subject to its own trajectory and rhythm, its own timing and pace, until there comes a time when “...life has flown...”; or at least appears that way. Before it does return, however, as Dr Eisley reminds us, there will, indeed, be unparalleled opportunities to discover another side of the beauty that sits so deeply in these hills it exists through all time and all conditions.



As I write these words, November 2010 has nearly completed its march into the history books. It is Black Friday, the day on which half of America descends onto the commercial plain intent on spending money most of it doesn't have for things it hardly needs; but who am I do ascribe need and want. The high temperature on this day has been 43°, a sharp contrast to the high 60's

**First Snow, Campbell Overlook
Great Smoky Mountains National Park**

of the earlier part of the week. A cold front is moving through and highs over the next several days are projected to be in the low 50's, with lows in the mid-to-high 20's. Though the cloud cover is now breaking up, overnight it brought a much needed and welcomed soaking rain. The creeks will be laughing again for a while.



**Cove Hardwood Color
Great Smoky Mountains National Park**

Three weeks from today in 2009 there began a winter that has been hailed as one of the most severe in recent memory, one that saw twice the average annual snowfall to which we are accustomed around here. Will the winter of 2010 come near being the same? Most prognosticators say not likely; time will tell. Speaking of time, on Tuesday, November 30, the road to Clingman's

Dome closes for the season, as it does every year, unless a weather event necessitates closure before then. Of course you can always bike the fourteen mile round trip, just be prepared for the cold. Any time in winter you are considering coming to the Park to photograph a cold weather event you should check the GSM Road Report by calling (865) 436-1200, Opt. 2, Opt. 2, in the menu.

Once Clingman's Dome Road closes, sunrise and sunset opportunities in the Park will be fairly limited until spring. Late afternoon light at Morton Overlook can be a productive experience, either when snow is on the ground, or there's a weather event such as mist or fog, or with the idea of using the light to convert an image to black and white. But sunset is a different matter.



**Fall's Last Stand, Upper Sugarlands Valley
Great Smoky Mountains National Park**

I've given lengthy descriptions of why this is so in previous newsletters, and I won't do so again here. From mid-September to mid-April sunset opportunities are elsewhere. As for sunrise, Luftee Overlook will be a wonderful opportunity for the next three

months, with the only drawback being the fact that there is no foliage on the hardwoods below Luftee Gap. However, again, this could be a great chance to play with black and white conversions; not only at the overlook itself, but along



**Old Oak in Snow, Newfound Gap Road
Great Smoky Mountains National Park**

Newfound Gap Road on the south side of Luftee where there are wonderful old gnarled oaks whose character beckons treatment as grayscale.

Sunrise at Luftee Overlook between **December 1, 2010** and **February 28, 2011** will be approximately 7:24 a.m. on December 1; 7:44 a.m. on January 12; 7:43 a.m. on January 13; and 7:06 a.m. on February 28. **Sunset at Morton Overlook** during that same period will be from 5:20 p.m. on December 1; 5:40 p.m. on January 12; 5:40 p.m. on January 13; and 6:27 p.m. on February 28.

If this year's winter offers even close to the same amount of snow and ice as last year's, then there will be multiple opportunities for images on both sides of the mountains. Just remember to check for road openings/closings before you make the journey so that you can minimize the amount of time spent waiting for a closed road to open again.

Rime ice is another winter weather event that can make for wonderful image opportunities. Rime ice comes in two types: hard rime and soft rime. Hard rime is a white ice that forms when water droplets in fog freeze on the outer surfaces of objects such as trees. The fog freezes on the windward side of the object usually in moderate to high wind velocities and in ambient air temperatures between 28°-18°F. Soft rime is less dense and milkier in appearance. It forms when water droplets in a light freezing fog or mist freeze on the outer surface of objects in calm or very light wind.

In either case, the result is an undeniable beauty. The event to watch for is an overcast evening that is forecast to be breaking up by morning. The ensuing wind speeds will determine which rime results, and how the clouds are dissipating will determine where. The air temperatures will be the deciding factor, and it is often the case that the ice will be gone by mid-day of the following day, so it's an event to which you must respond as quickly as possible.

Winter light, by itself, is a wonderful event; and with the air generally less hazy due to reduced respiration from plants, this light has a clear, crisp edge to it that can make for great images almost regardless of the other elements of the composition. Of course, early and late hours of the daylight period usually make for more dramatic and interesting results with winter light just as they do any other time of the year. One noteworthy exception to this general observation is

the opportunity to photograph stacked blue ridges – the symbolic representation, in my mind, of what the Smokies are known for: the Place of Blue Smoke. Depending on your location with respect to the ridges you are photographing, either mid-morning or mid-afternoon works best, especially when there is lingering valley fog or mist. And now is the perfect time of year to be looking for this opportunity.

Just because there's no foliage does not mean that water images should no longer be on your menu. In fact, they should be just as much topics of consideration now as they ever are. Rock and water combinations, ice forms on rocks and other elements caused by freezing spray, reflections: you name it.



**Fallen Leaves in Pothole, Middle Prong Little Pigeon River
Great Smoky Mountains National Park**

If water is involved, the next three months will be great times to photograph it. Any number of locations qualifies as excellent choices: Greenbrier, Little River, Tremont, Big Creek, Deep Creek, and Oconaluftee. All offer beautiful examples of what makes Smokies water special. Just remember that moisture-covered rocks and boulders can present special hazards and challenges during this part of the year, and be very careful in scrambling around in winter streams.

Some of my favorite winter subjects are the many historic structures which can be found in the Smokies: the cabins and clapboard homes, the barns and other farm structures, the churches, and especially the mills. Cades Cove, Cataloochee, Roaring Fork/Cherokee Orchard, and Oconaluftee offer great opportunities for this, as do backcountry trails like Maddron Bald and Little Cataloochee. Here, again, black and white conversions can add a different dimension to your work. If you are feeling ambitious or in need of serious exercise, a hike to the fire tower on Mount Cammerer is a tremendous experience in winter. From Cosby Campground, Low Gap Trail to the Appalachian Trail to the Mount Cammerer Trail is my favorite route, though there are others. This route is a shade over 10 miles round trip, so you'll want to get an early start, but the views from the tower and the images of the structure on its rocky perch will make your effort worthwhile. The Cammerer fire tower is built on the "Yosemite model" and is, therefore, unlike typical eastern structures of its kind.

Winter in the Smokies is about anything but death or immobility or lack. If that's how you see this time of year in this place, then you have missed something elemental and real. Winter is a time of essences revealed, a time when the make-up of color and soft texture has been removed to show the true substances

beneath: the underlying forms, the foundational first causes. In winter, the rock, water, and light embrace the bones of an ancient biology to show the basement level determination of life to endure; not in spite of, but in concert with those forces from which it has sprung.

And the imagery that this revelation makes possible is of a beauty that is more than skin deep. It exists at the core.

A Tip is Worth..?

Practice, Practice, Practice: with Purpose

Most gulls don't bother to learn more than the simplest facts of flight – how to get from shore to food and back again. For most gulls, it is not flying that matters, but eating. For this gull, though, it was not eating that mattered, but flight. More than anything else, Jonathan Livingston Seagull loved to fly.

Richard Bach

from ***Jonathan Livingston Seagull***

Why do you photograph? What do you wish to derive from it, really? Are you a professional, whose passion for images guides your seeking to earn a living from your efforts; or are you a serious amateur who simply wishes to enjoy the natural world and learn to express its beauty as well as you can; or have you newly come to nature photography and have yet to come to any conclusion about why you have an interest in things photographic? Does it matter? I don't know; I don't think so.



I have not read **Malcolm Gladwell's** bestselling

Outliers, but one of the basic premises of the book is something that is anything but new – that in order to really be successful at some endeavor, 10,000 hours of practice are required. Gladwell has even crafted a rule to embody this reality: the **10,000 Hour Rule**, which, of course, is not necessarily a literal truth, but certainly a figurative one that implies hour upon hour of seemingly endless practice in order to approach some level of skill that approximates mastery.

When I was a child in the 1950's, the New York Yankees were my heroes; so I

learned as much as I could about who they were and how they had come to be so good at what they did. At the top of the list was **Mickey Mantle**, that baby-faced kid who could hit a baseball a country mile from either side of the plate. I remember seeing a movie version of Mantle's youth called *The Mickey Mantle Story*. In it, Mantle's father **Elvin** spends countless hours pitching balls to his sometimes resistant, but ultimately compliant son, insisting that the boy switch from the right- to the left-handed batter's position regularly as he does. The outcome is an athlete who is still considered by many as the greatest switch-hitter ever to play the game of baseball. I understood the 10,000 Hour Rule long before I knew there was such a thing. Perhaps what I really want to say is that I understood that mastery of anything comes as the result of practice, practice, and more practice. Mantle's mastery was no accident; and even though he may have been a "natural" athlete, switch-hitting did not come naturally. It came as the result of great effort over a very long time, maybe even 10,000 hours.

Photography is just the same. Mastery of it, too, comes with countless hours of practice that cannot be exempted; and mastery doesn't discriminate between whether you are a professional or a hobbyist, a novice or a seasoned veteran.

Yet practice is much more than mere repetition; the practice that begins to make a difference is practice that has a specific purpose – that results in the creation of a particular skill set or awareness. If you would like to become better at "seeing" like a lens sees, then craft for yourself games that you can play that will teach you how various focal length ranges see the world.

For example, if you want to know more about how wide-angle lenses see, then read until you understand the mechanics of this process: learn the angles of view of the wide-angle range, then look through your viewfinder at these focal lengths until you understand what a 99° angle of view looks like at 18mm of focal length, or what 62° looks like at 35mm. Learn how wide-angle lenses make foreground elements appear larger, then take your camera with a wide-angle lens and see how different foreground elements appear and change in relative size at a given focal length as you get closer to and further away from the element. Look at the size of the element at the minimum focusing distance and move further away until you begin to feel that the element is becoming so small that it is losing its impact as a foreground. Do this with different sized elements: a small flower



**Near the Headwaters, Big Ivy Creek
Pisgah National Forest**

cluster as compared to a #10 washtub, until you have a sense of how various sized elements will appear in an image at various distances.

Learn how background elements seen through wide-angle lenses appear smaller and further away than they do to the naked eye. Compose images with your wide-angle lens; then look at the background elements through the viewfinder. Notice their relative sizes; then look over the top of your camera with your naked eyes and see how much larger the background element now appears. Use this awareness to teach yourself to gauge how background elements will appear in wide-angle images when they are of particular sizes and particular distances from the foreground.

Learn that the relative distances between foreground, mid-ground, and background elements seen through a wide-angle lens appear to be exacerbated and extended;



**Sable River, Grand Sable Dunes
Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore**



**Au Train Falls, Au Train River
Alger County, Michigan**

then take your camera and compose wide-angle images. Pay close attention to the distances that seem to exist between fore-, mid-, and background elements of the image. Change your focal length from the wider end of the range to the longer end of the range; that is, from, say, 16mm to 35mm, and notice the effect that increasing the focal length has on the appearance of those distances. Do this, too: raise and lower the camera while keeping it in the same relative distance plane to your subject. As you make these changes, notice how the distances we are discussing seem to increase or decrease.

These are just some of the things you can learn about how your wide-angle lens sees the world from simple exercises designed to show you the effects in real time.

Once you know them, you can practice them again and again until using this lens becomes second nature. Yet, again, more than just repeating an exercise, make a game of it,

so that it is learning with purpose; but more importantly, learning with playfulness – that turns into fun.

Every other focal length can be treated the same way with respect to the ways it sees, as well. In fact every aspect of the photographic process – the craft of image-making can be approached in the same way. Practicing with purpose becomes the steppingstone to mastery; and as mastery begins to form, creativity begins to grow; and of creativity, there is no end.

As for EarthSong... Walking in Beauty...

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 somehow odd to reflect on the fact that as I write this, I am writing the last section of the final newsletter of 2010, which is to say that this seems to have

been a year that has simply flown by. What began as a wonderful workshop in Savannah, Georgia continued all the way to a great concluding experience in Southwest Harbor, Maine.

When Bonnie and I left North Carolina for the Georgia coast in March, there was snow on the ground that had been there almost

continuously since December 18, 2009.

Never have I seen a southern winter like it, and the year proceeded in its own peculiar way from there. Initially all the flowers seemed to be blooming quite late compared to recent memory; then things heated up and the season jumped ahead



**Early Light, Thornton Lake
Hiawatha National Forest**

and events continued that way for the duration. Planning, on the basis of history, went out the door.

Fall foliage was another matter altogether. Where there was sufficient moisture and cool September temperatures, the colors were awesome. Where it had been dry and September remained warm, the display was more subdued.

The bottom line is simply that 2010 has been a beautiful year, regardless; and I am so very grateful to all of you who have joined us somewhere, anywhere on the road, or in Western North Carolina. We have had a wonderful time with all of you and hope we have been able to be positive parts of your creative journey.

As we think about entering into the New Year, there are so many things to look forward to that I hardly know where to begin. There are plenty of workshops, as well as other events to consider:

First, in January 2011, I'll be involved once again in the **Wilderness Wildlife Week** programs in **Pigeon Forge**, Tennessee.

This year my audio/visual programs will be on Friday, **January 14**, and the workshop which **Kendall Chiles**, **Harold Stinnette**, and I have been doing for the past several years has been moved to Saturday morning, **January 15**.

I am very pleased to announce that the **Savannah Workshop, March 19-25** is already full, but if you would like to be placed on the waiting list for this event, please let me know and I'll be glad to add you to it.

There are spaces available in the **Charleston Workshop, March 26-April 1**. Last year we introduced several new locations into this workshop and the result was a magical experience for everyone. This year we'll revisit those places and maybe new ones as well. The rich history and wondrous beauty of the Low Country are experiences you will never forget. So plan to join us in Charleston in March.



Abstraction in Water
Copper Country State Forest



Boat Hulls and Marsh Grass, Folly Creek
Charleston, South Carolina

In April we'll be back home in Western North Carolina for our annual **Smokies Spring Workshop, April 9-15**. This year we're returning to **Cherokee** to work out of that location. There are many excellent photographers who offer many wonderful photographic experiences in the Smokies; but none of them call Great Smoky Mountains National Park home, and that's the difference. 2009 was one of the most wonderful blooming years in my memory, but a Smokies spring is special for so many other reasons. The colors of spring foliage, though more subtle, are every bit as vibrant as those of fall, and the light in spring has a clarity that can almost be touched. There are spaces in this workshop.



**Spring "Green", Campbell Overlook
Great Smoky Mountains National Park**

My first **John C. Campbell Folk School** class of 2011 will coincide with **Earth Day**, from **April 17-23**. This class is for all levels of skill and is based, as always, on my ideas of **"Seeing with Heart."** To check registration for this class, contact the Folk School at **(800) FOLK-SCH/365-5724**, or on-line at www.FolkSchool.org. The Folk School experience is always special, and Earth Day will make it even more so.



The Old Dairy, John C. Campbell Folk School

April 29-May 1 mark the dates for the annual **Cumberland Falls State Resort Park Nature Photography Weekend**. This beautiful natural area located just south of **Corbin, Kentucky** is known for the awesome beauty of its majestic falls, as well as the quality of its annual nature photography event. I'm looking forward to being part of it. For registration information contact **Bret Smitley** at BretA.Smitley@ky.gov.

If you are a member of the **CNPA-Upstate Region** and want to have a wonderful learning experience in Western North Carolina's Southern Appalachians, then mark your calendar for **May 6-8**. That weekend Bonnie and

I will be hosting a **“Fussy Photographers Weekend Workshop”** in

Asheville. There will be educational programs, field experiences, and critiques all built around my notions of the importance of learning to be a “Fussy” Photographer in our approach to both art and craft. This workshop is limited to **10 participants**, and there are a few spaces remaining. For more information about this event contact **Cindy Landrum**, co-cordinator of CNPA-Upstate at cindy@cindylandrum.com.



The Potholes in Spring, Pisgah National Forest

May 29-June 4 I’ll be teaching again at **John C. Campbell Folk School** and this will be a very special week, indeed. This will be the first class ever to devote an entire week to the idea of the

“Fussy Photographer”, so it’s going to be an intense week of learning the art and the craft of nature imagery. Intermediate level skills are required to be a part of it; and that’s not meant in any elitist sort of way. It’s just going to be that intense. Processing software and a knowledge of how to use it are required, as well as a thorough understanding of the mechanics of exposure and composition. For registration



**Late Afternoon Light, Cowee Mountains Overlook
Blue Ridge Parkway**

information contact **Karen Beaty, Program Manager** at **(800) FOLK-SCH/365-5724**, or karen@folkschool.org.

June 11-17 This has become a very special time on our calendar. It marks the **Acadia National Park/Mount Desert Island Spring Workshop**. As is customary, we’ll be working out of **Southwest Harbor** and the **Seawall Motel**. If you think of Mount Desert Island only as a place of wonderful fall foliage, in addition to its amazing rocks and water, then you’ve missed one of nature’s real treats. Spring in Acadia is a glistening jewel awaiting discovery. The flowers of the island, the atmospherics of a Downeast vernal morning, and, as always, the presence and proximity of the mighty Atlantic come together to create an amazing landscape of opportunity that you will remember with a smile for the

rest of your life.

It is impossible for me to be in Acadia in early-June without evoking the memory of the great master of the intimate landscape, Eliot Porter. This place, at this time, is one of the most intimate photographic experiences you can imagine, with hosts who have become family and locations that, although ever-new, have become like old friends. For information on this workshop contact me at don@EarthSongPhotography.com, or (828) 788-0687.



Ant and Bunchberry, Acadia National Park

June 18-24 The culmination of the mid-year schedule is an event that will be almost too special to describe.

This event is so new it hasn't even made it to the brochure yet; and, still, it's nearly half-full. The **Adirondack Splendor: Moving Beyond Your Creative Comfort Zone Workshop** promises to be one of those special experiences that you will carry with you wherever you go.

There are 12 spaces in this workshop because I've going to be assisted by **John DiGiacomo**, a rising new instructor, who lives part of the year in **Lake Placid** where this event will be based. John's love of this area is infectious, and he's already given it to me; so if you aren't inoculated against a passionate feeling for place, be forewarned.



Osgood Pond, Adirondack Park



Connery Pond Morning, Adirondack Park

We will be lodging at and working from the **North Woods Inn** in downtown Lake Placid and we'll be ranging into the **Adirondack High Peaks** in search of flowers, ferns, and other flora, as well as the superb combinations of rock, water,

and light for which the High Peaks is so well-known. This workshop will be the first EarthSong weeklong event to be built around the principles of the Fussy Photographer, so there's a lot of excitement that's gone into preparing it for you.

We are being sponsored in this by the **Adirondack Photography Institute**, one of the premier workshop companies in the country. The tuition is **\$1350**, which is exclusive of meals and lodging. If you register before **March 1, 2011**, however, there will be a **5% early-bird discount** given. So, early registration has a bonus.

Registration for this unique event is through **John Radigan**, the Director of Adirondack Photography Institute at john@adkpi.org, or **(216) 531-2155**.

We are looking forward to a wonderful year of fun, fellowship, and creativity in some of the most beautiful places on earth; and we hope you will choose to join us somewhere on the journey.

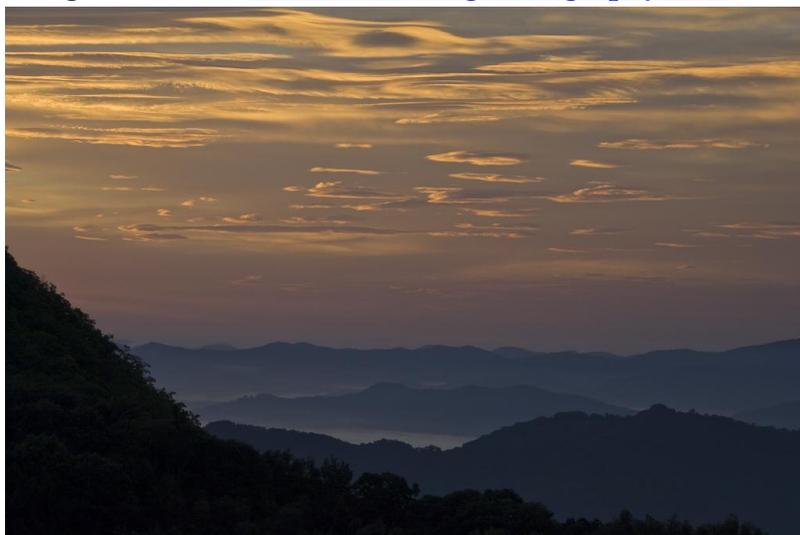
We wish for all of you the most joyous and peaceful of Holiday Seasons and the happiest and most prosperous of New Years.

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

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Au Sable River Reflection
Adirondack Park



Sunrise, Purchase Knob, Great Smoky Mountains National Park