

## Apogee Photo Magazine



# THE ROAD TO PAHAYOKEE: Taking Photos with the Rising Sun

by Clifford Kolber

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**Here comes the sun!**

these mysterious wetlands live on, albeit precariously!

Even with the threat to its existence, the Everglades still remains a unique wilderness of sawgrass, bedrock, swamps, and tree islands. The “River of Grass,” a term coined by Marjory Stoneman Douglas in the 1940’s, comes alive when you slow down, relax, and let the environment settle in around you.

The main road inside the park stretches thirty-eight miles to Flamingo, a tiny community built from the remnants of a 1900’s fishing village. Vast expanses of sawgrass, cypress, wildlife, and mangroves lie along the way, sliced with side roads leading to marked attractions and a variety of hiking, boating, and canoe trails. Today, we’ll explore one of the side roads for an early morning photo adventure.

Thirteen miles inside the park is the turnoff to

Everglades National Park is one of the most endangered areas of our national park system. As a native of Miami, I have witnessed the incredible demise of great flocks of birds, trees, and vast expanses of wetlands throughout South Florida, all as a result of urban sprawl and farmland pollution. Over the years, birds have moved on, and fauna and plant life have decreased. Yet the serenity and unique beauty of

“Pahayokeye Overlook,” a boardwalk stretching for miles that rises above the vastness of the Everglades. You can gain access via a seemingly nondescript road that meanders from the main road through sawgrass and cypress strands. This road to Pahayokeye becomes a jewel in the early morning, but only for those who take the time to look.



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### **Good Morning Pahayokeye.**

Sunrise in the Everglades can be powerful and dramatic. But, since the land is flat with only trees and sawgrass to vary the horizon, landscape photography is largely ignored by the hordes of photographers who come to shoot birds and wildlife. A few early morning outings, though, could change their minds once they captured a few majestically stunning images.

To photograph along the road to Pahayokeye, it's best to arrive about 45 minutes before sunrise. This leeway gives you a chance to scope the area, set up, and let the surroundings settle in around you. You'll see and hear the Everglades come to life--birds waking, the sky brightening, and the rising symphony of strange and mysterious sounds characteristic of the Everglades.



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### **Pahayokeye Cypress**

The range of subjects and images along the road to Pahayokeye are limited only by your imagination. Leave pre-conceived notions at home. Walk around and scout the area before unpacking your gear. If you let the surroundings grow around you, then you'll make an early morning in the Everglades transform into unique and outstanding images!

Don't drive to the boardwalk. Instead, park your car within a few hundred yards of the main road. You can set up on the side of the road, or if the water level is low (in the winter and early spring), you can wander into the bedrock and sawgrass to shoot a wider variety of compositions and subjects. If you do walk off-road, be sure to tread

carefully since the ground can be unstable. Also, wear long pants. “Sawgrass” has that name for a reason. Finally, if you wander off-road during the wet season, be sure to keep an eye out for alligators. They can become ornery if startled.

Along the east side of the road, you’ll find cypress trees of all sizes. For a sunrise silhouette, try to select a subject and composition *before* the sun breaks the horizon, so you don't waste precious time when you need it most. You can also shoot in pre-dawn light; you might create some of your best images then. Be sure to use a tripod. Although you should be using a tripod at all times, you’ll especially need one in pre-dawn when your shooting speed will be slower. You’ll find a telephoto zoom lens (100-400mm) and graduated neutral-density filter (unless you’re shooting digital HDR) handy.

Pre-dawn becomes a serene palette of colors, and when the sun’s globe breaks the horizon, new excitement begins. Things happen quickly; colors and scenes change instantly. Fog, clouds, and other conditions will determine what’s happening and for how long. Your role as a photographer is to adapt to the moment and catch the fleeting image, however quick it may be.

To create unique images, be sure to keep your creative juices flowing. Look around, find foreground subjects to add impact, use silhouettes, and make the morning explode! Cypress trees have a lot of character and are willing subjects. They’ll pose as silhouettes, reflect themselves in wetlands, or create a frame around the sunrise. My favorite composition is when the rising sun is framed by a silhouetted cypress tree. Take care, of course, not to look directly at the sun’s globe through the lens, since direct exposure can cause injury to your eye.

Once the sun rises and is bright, shift your attention. Turn around, look behind and around you, and take advantage of the golden light on the landscape. Be sure to use your polarizer in order to enhance the sky and clouds. The highest polarizing effect occurs when you’re shooting 90° from the sun, and it reduces as you get closer to the plane of the sun. A polarizer will also reduce glare from water or dew.



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### **What a sunrise at Pahayokeye!**

Constantly ask yourself,



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### Gold Cypress

around you. The cliché is that South Florida has only two seasons--“wet” and “dry.” The dry season is during winter and early spring, characterized by wetlands that turn into parched, cracked mud lakes. Winter brings an abundance of wading birds, cool foggy mornings, and relief (hopefully) from mosquitoes!

Summer and early fall make up the wet season which brings thunderstorms, high water, stifling hot, humid days, and mosquitoes. Be sure to carry bug spray and a bug jacket. Summer also brings an abundance of flowers, including swamp lilies that bloom throughout the sawgrass prairies. Summer in the Everglades can be a physically demanding time, but it can also be extremely rewarding photographically.



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### A heron perches in the fog.

An amazing phenomenon in the Everglades is the dazzling display of spider webs that light up on foggy or dewy mornings. The sawgrass plains are always covered with webs. The webs light the best when they're backlit by the sun on foggy or dewy mornings. One of my favorite locations from which to photograph this event is on the main road just a couple hundred yards south of the Pahayokee turnoff. Backlit by the early morning sun, the field on the east side of the road magically comes alive with webs that stretch as far as you can see. It's a fabulous sight to witness and photograph. When you shoot the webs, remember to compensate for the backlighting.

“What is my subject?”

Remember what attracted you to the scene. Simplify, narrow your field of focus, and zero in on what caught your attention. It might be the way a branch bends, or it may be a tiny fungus on the bark of a tree. Work your subject, shoot it from different angles, and shoot with different lenses.

The time of year will determine the conditions

Spending an early morning along the road to Pahayokee is time well invested. There are a wealth of images to be captured in this very small portion of the Everglades National Park. Enjoy the area, tread lightly, and “pack it in, pack it out.” Don’t litter and don’t damage anything. Leave the area as it was when you arrived, and the road to Pahayokee will remain a memorable and rewarding experience for everyone to enjoy.



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**A pond apple petal.**

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Cliff Kolber is a nature and travel photographer/writer based in Miami, Florida. He and his wife Doris have created a spectacular portfolio of images and articles from around the world, specializing in the Florida Everglades, the American Southwest and Antarctica.

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