

Apogee Photo Magazine

FIRST CLASS PHOTOGRAPHY:

LESSON 32

Tripping into a Fall

by Willis T Bird



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Sometimes you get lucky. At our house, we don't take a vacation or trip every year. When we do, we plan ahead. However, when you have to depend on Mother Nature to cooperate with you, you're playing with fire. We've tried to hit the fall color-changing of the leaves before and usually arrived too early or too late to catch the peak of color. This year, I started planning two

months in advance. There had been a shortage of rain in our target region, so that would play a part, since a drought sometimes means a bright but shortened color time. We wanted to go to an area where we had never been before, and we decided on Pigeon Forge, Gatlinburg, and Cades Cove, Tennessee.

We love the back roads and usually shy away from interstates, so we collected maps and planned our route. We did not wish to arrive on the day we scheduled our first night stay. So, we made an additional stop at a motel at Cleveland, Tennessee, which was only a couple hours drive from our destination. Also, we determined that we could easily drive back-roads to Cades Cove before arriving at Pigeon Forge, where we had our motel room reservations. This route would take us to our destination by early afternoon. The batteries for both cameras were charged, and both the tripod and monopod were ready and loaded in the car a day ahead of time.

But before we could arrive, as Mother Nature would have it, the wind gusted from 60 mph to 106 mph in the area we were going to visit. I imagined all the beautiful leaves coating the ground, with the



trees standing there bare as a newborn babe. I did not think of the possibility of downed trees blocking the roads, which was what happened. Unknown to us, however, the Park



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Service went to work and cleared the roads just before we arrived. This situation meant that there was now a glut of motorists wanting to see the place. We paused only briefly to read a sign warning that a one-way drive through the cove over the unpaved roads would take from two to three hours. We had a half-tank of gas, so we drove onward.

What we saw amazed us. I had heard of Cades Cove and have seen photos of the place, but being there was a completely different experience. It was overwhelming. The trip was slow with many stops. This pace suited us just fine, because we wanted time to take as many photos as possible. We had brought our battery chargers with us, along with multiple batteries and media chips.

It was true that trees were down everywhere. Not hundreds but thousands of trees had been downed by the winds. However, their leaves had somehow tenaciously hung onto the remaining trees, making them brilliant with colors. Where we come from, the land is flat. Cades Cove was filled with hills and mountains. Along the trail stood very old homesteads, churches, barns, log cabins, and other backwoods structures. We saw deer but no bears, although both roam the area. In fact, the only critical omission along the route was a lack of restrooms. I think there was one spot that may have had facilities, but so many cars were parked there, I figured I didn't have a chance. So we trooped onward. After a while, my mixture of joy and grief (the joy of the scenes before me contrasted with the pain of my over-extended bladder) was causing some very odd expressions on my face. But we made it, and I would recommend the trip to anyone.



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Aside from the Cades Cove adventure, I also recommend side trips off the Interstate Highways, if at all possible. We saw many interesting scenes and items that people had created beside the road. Because of the twists and turns of the road, the drive does not become as boring as a trip of similar duration would be on one of the

big four-lane highways. A little planning with maps ahead of time can get you where you want to go with little trouble.

We did not take in Dollywood as we originally planned. The weather was a bit too cold.

But we did visit a very neat, well laid out aquarium in Gatlinburg that should not be missed. Within the Gatlinburg area, there is no lack of eating places or activities to pursue. I cannot remember taking another trip that was as much fun as this one.