Nature Photography

On the Road in Alberta

Alan and Elaine Wilson

Nature Photography

Alberta

A Blurb BookWright Publication

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BIGHORN SHEEP – ADOPTED AS ALBERTA'S LAND MAMMAL SYMBOL IN 1989

Preface

Alberta has three distinct landform regions, Western Cordillera (mountains), Interior Plains (the prairies) and the western edge of the Canadian Shield. The province is predominantly a flat, fertile landscape dominated by the Great Plains of North America. Its western edge, however, is renown throughout the world for spectacular mountain scenery, home to Jasper and Banff National Parks. Countless snow-capped peaks form the Canadian Rockies, with many reaching to 11,000 feet, or more. It experiences a humid continental climate with warm summers. However, it is open to cold arctic weather systems from the north, which often produce extremely cold conditions in winter.

Ever wonder where all those majestic images of the Canadian Rockies were taken? Pinpointing most of the iconic locations is relatively easy. However, being there at the right time and homing in with a stunning composition is another matter. It's pointless to reiterate all the superlatives describing the vastness and grandeur of this area. To us, the Rockies are aptly named. It is, indeed, a large pile of rocks interlaced with streams, rivers, lakes and forests that house an abundance of wildlife that create an endless photography experience. Amazingly, it's also still relatively pristine. Despite the considerable infrastructure developed to handle the tourists and traffic that dominate activity during the summer months, it retains an almost surreal atmosphere from even the most easily accessible locations. Seasonally, the Rockies can be characterized as having long winters with a short, wet spring and colorful, dry fall. However, there are definite times to avoid. June is wet and infested with ticks while January is bitterly cold.

This book attempts to display some of the many images we captured while traveling throughout the Canadian Rockies. The synopsis we provide follows a Summer and Winter format as each area is unique in terms of predominant wildlife species and landscape potential. There are also hidden gems such as the Birds of Prey Nature Center in Coaldale and the incredible frozen landscape of the Kootenay Plains. It's an amazing area and one we have visited many times where each trip has divulged something new and exciting.

Alan D. and Elaine R. Wilson
Vernon, British Columbia

Jasper National Park

The town of Jasper resides in the Rocky Mountains at the cusp of the Yellowhead Highway and the Icefields Parkway (which run roughly east-west and north-south respectively). We won't spend any time describing the grandeur of the area. The scenery throughout the Canadian Rockies is renown worldwide. Wildlife photography, however, can be problematic as many animals are encountered at or near roadside, causing traffic congestion and hazardous conditions as viewers slow down or try to park and commercial traffic continues to push through. Although this is hard to avoid at times, we visited many locations where it's relatively easy to mitigate most of these issues by simply taking a short walk or alpine hike. Generally, the mountain backdrops we encountered off the beaten track were far superior to any we experienced at roadside.

Summer

Late Summer and early fall offer significantly more access to this area than the winter months. We usually visited in late July to early August and late September to early October to avoid the rain and wood ticks prevalent during the earlier months.

The major attractions in the area surrounding Jasper are Bighorn Sheep and Elk. The latter is better known as Wapiti. The best time to photograph either is during the rut in late September when the animals have bulked up from summer feeding and are beginning to develop winter coats. Although Bighorn Sheep usually congregate to the east of Jasper either on the Yellowhead Highway or on the cliffs and meadows within a short distance from the road, our favorite location was south of Hinton near the Cadomin coal mine. The best locations for Elk were the Wapiti Campground or just a short distance from the entrance to the Maligne Lake Road.

Late May and June still finds most wildlife concentrated at lower elevations, enjoying warm temperatures

ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK (MALE)
Jasper National Park, Alberta

and early spring growth. The tram up Whistlers Mountain is worthwhile and a good area to capture an image of a Columbian Ground Squirrel as they abound in the upper meadows. There is also a Hoary Marmot colony in the rocks at the base of the tram trail, a target species that has eluded us for some time.

Unlike the town of Banff, we feel the Jasper environs offers little in the way of compelling landscape photography. The exception is the Pyramid Lake Road. This gem leads to some great locations. Patricia Lake and Pyramid Lake are best sunrise to mid-morning for reflections of Pyramid Mountain, especially in the fall as the aspen groves change color. There is always the potential to play with abstracts of the aspen grove at the picnic area. Pyramid Island is a good walk-around just over the small connecting bridge for views of the Trident Range. Best, however, is the outlet stream just past the parking lot at roads end. A short walk leads to a sheltered bay where a reflection of Pyramid Mountain is much easier to attain than along the earlier roadside locations.

Although we consider the Maligne Lake Road a winter must, it can cough up some good images during the summer and fall months. This is especially true at the Medicine Lake viewing stand where the boulders and shallow shoreline act as an excellent foreground to frame views of the Queen Elizabeth and Maligne Ranges. It's a great place to photograph Pika as they scamper around the rocks that dominate the hill at roadside.

Cavell Pond, which is roughly thirty minutes south of the Jasper townsite, is an interesting morning location. Here the attraction is Angel Glacier, a small waterfall and picturesque pond with floating ice. Mount Edith Cavell is, of course, a definite icon of the Canadian Rockies. Getting close is another matter! The access road is steep with switchbacks and a bit of a nerve-racking drive but worth the effort, especially as there are several good viewpoints of the Astoria River Gorge and headwaters. The road terminates at the Tonquin Valley trailhead with easy access to the shoreline of Cavell Lake. The Path of the Glacier Trail can be rewarding hike, especially along the short and less strenuous lower loop where flowers make a great foreground to the mountain scenery.

Slightly farther south there are several access points to the Athabaska River where it is easy to frame either Mount Kerkeslin or Hardisty. An alternative is the Moab Lake Road as there is a viewpoint that frames Mount Hardisty using the Whirlpool River as a foreground. We found many locations that were worth exploring, most notably Leach Lake, especially from the north end where there were many opportunities for reflections of Whirlpool Peak and Mount Fryatt. Down the road there are the three small Fryatt Ponds that can also produce reflecting images of Whirlpool Peak and Mount Fryatt to the east and Mount Kerkeslin to the west. The third pond, roughly two kilometers beyond the first two, is a dangerous location as the meadows and foreshore are really a deep, spongy

quagmire that require not only knee-high boots but also slow, cautionary steps as they may swallow you alive!

A must stop at sunrise is the Athabaska River bridge as it provides a great look at the De Smet Range (Gargoyle, Esplanade and Chetamon Mountains). Lastly, a drive along the Miette Hot Springs road, although narrow and tree lined, offers interesting opportunities at the Collieries, Punchbowl Falls, Ashlar Ridge and the hot springs themselves at the end of the road, especially Sulphur Creek.

Winter

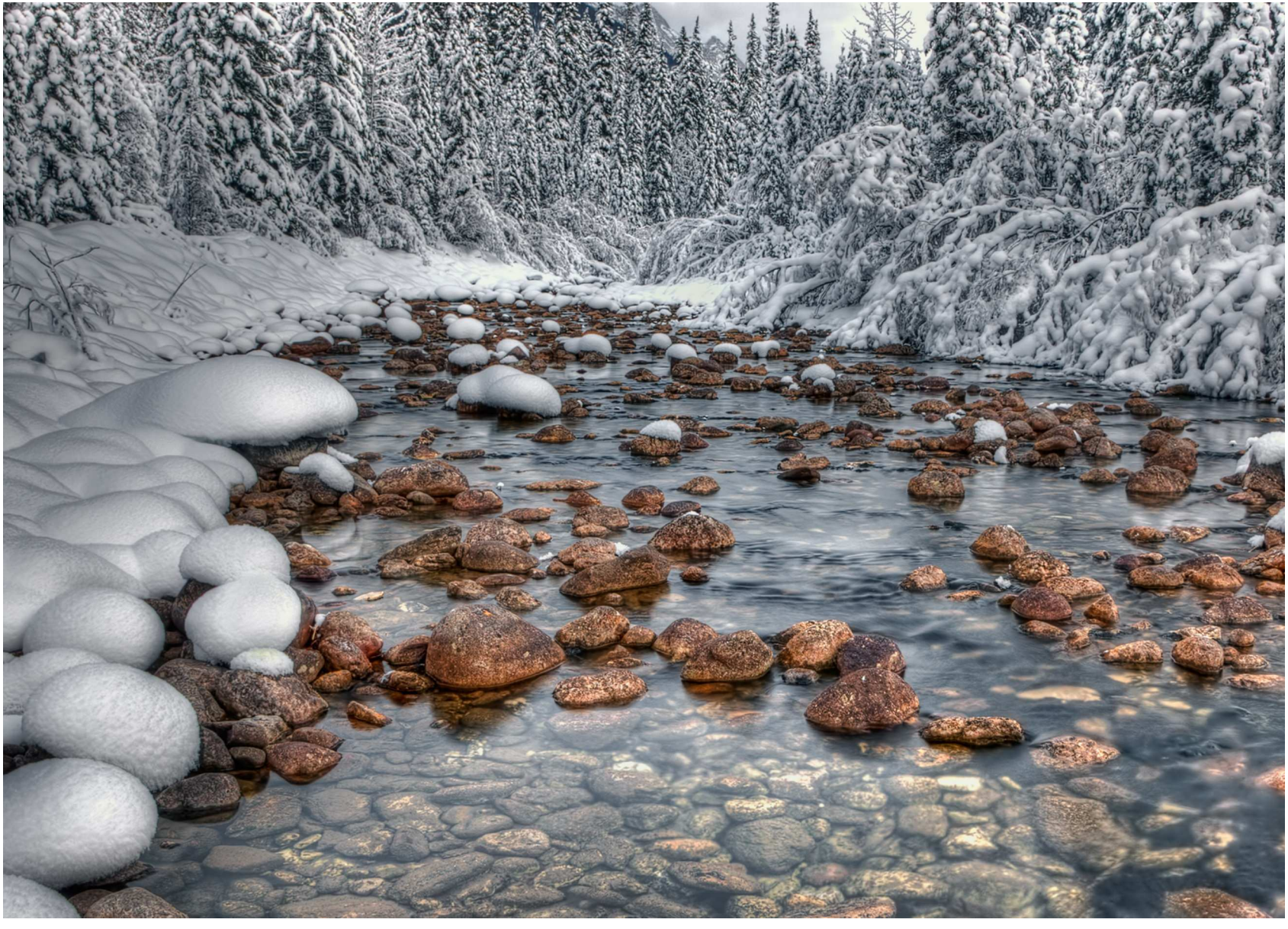
The Maligne Lake Road is a definite winter must as the trees are usually covered in fresh snow and the Maligne River still has many open stretches of running water. As mentioned above, the Medicine Lake pull-off is an excellent location. A fresh snow and sidelight can cast shadows amongst the boulders that dot lakeside, creating a pristine perspective of the Queen Elizabeth and Maligne Ranges. Last stop is the bridge next to the lodge. Here we often encountered mists that coated the shoreline trees with hoar frost or a reflecting pool mirroring the nearby peaks. The only good opportunity we omitted along this route was the famous “canyon crawl” beginning at the Fifth Bridge. This requires crampons and some stamina but is a great trek for abstarcts of hanging ice and snow formations.

A second good winter route is south off the Icefields Parkway to both Otto's Cache and Meeting of the Waters. The attraction here is twofold. First is the opportunity to capture Mount Hardisty or Kerkeslin from the icebound foreshore of the Athabaska River, especially at dusk. Alternatively, both are good locations to look for interesting ice and open water formations.

PIKA

Medicine Lake, Jasper National Park, Alberta

BIGHORN SHEEP (MALE)
Cadomin near Hinton, Alberta



MALIGNE RIVER
Jasper National Park, Alberta

MALIGNE LAKE
Jasper National Park, Alberta

BIGHORN SHEEP
(MALE AND FEMALE)
Cadomin near Hinton, Alberta

BIGHORN SHEEP
(JUVENILE)
Jasper National Park, Alberta

BIGHORN SHEEP (MALE)
Cadomin near Hinton, Alberta

ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK (MALE)
Jasper National Park, Alberta

ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK (MALE)
Jasper National Park, Alberta

COLUMBIA GROUND SQUIRREL
Whistlers Mountain,
Jasper National Park, Alberta

LEAST CHIPMUNK
Medicine Lake,
Jasper National Park, Alberta

COYOTE
Hinton, Alberta

SUMMER

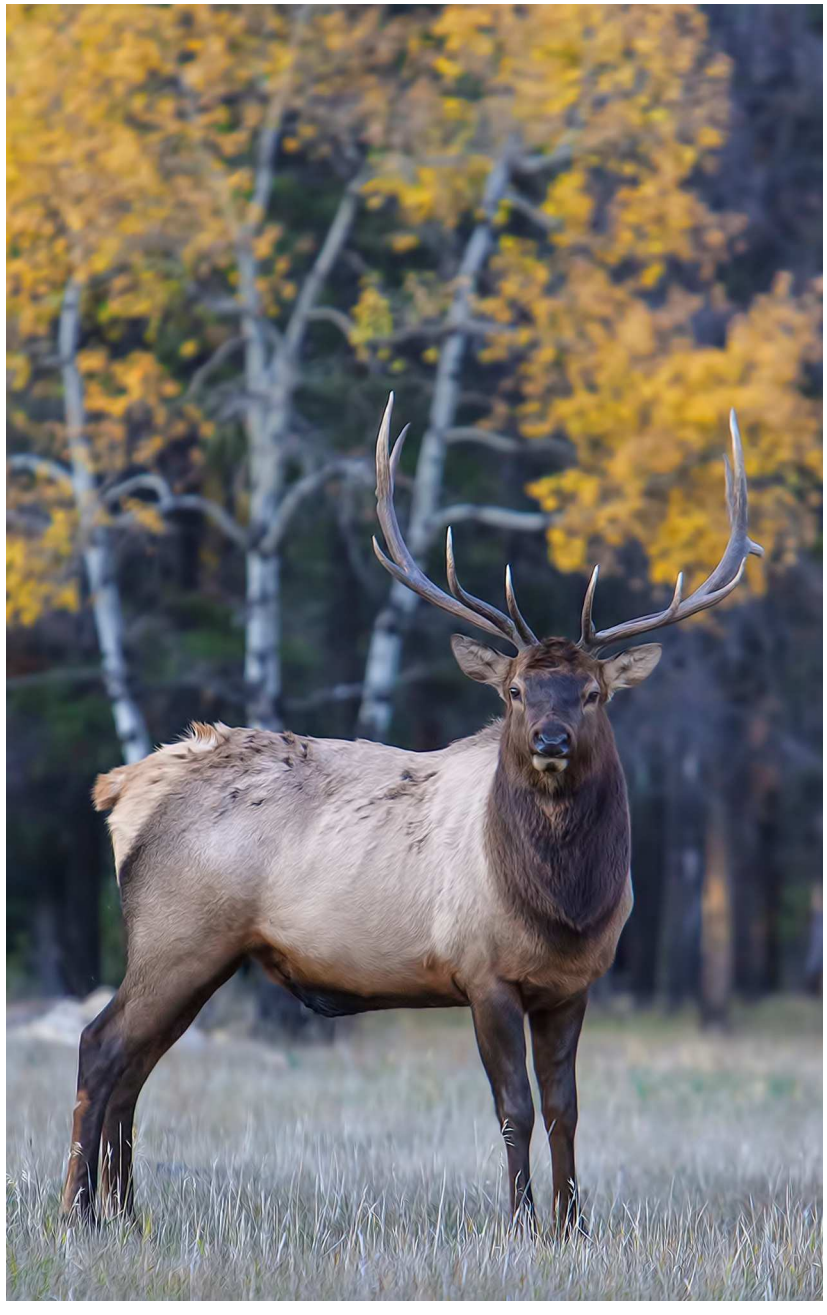
Medicine Lake, Jasper National Park, Alberta

WINTER
Medicine Lake, Jasper National Park, Alberta

BIGHORN SHEEP (FEMALE)
Jasper National Park, Alberta

BIGHORN SHEEP (MALE)
Cadomin near Hinton, Alberta

BIGHORN SHEEP (MALE)
Jasper National Park, Alberta



ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK (MALE)
Jasper National Park, Alberta

MARSH REFLECTIONS

Pyramid Mountain, Jasper National Park, Alberta

ICE FORMATIONS
Athabaska River at Otto's Cache,
Jasper National Park, Alberta

ICE FORMATIONS
Athabaska River at Meeting of the Waters,
Jasper National Park, Alberta

BIGHORN SHEEP (JUVENILE)
Jasper National Park, Alberta

BIGHORN SHEEP (MALE)
Cadomin near Hinton, Alberta

PIKA
Medicine Lake,
Jasper National Park, Alberta

BIGHORN SHEEP (MALE)
Cadomin near Hinton, Alberta

BIGHORN SHEEP (MALE)
Cadomin near Hinton, Alberta

The Ice Fields Parkway

It's simply impossible to take in all the known locations along this 230 kilometer stretch in one day. Winter travel between Banff and Jasper can also be a nerve-wracking experience. Although the road is well maintained, it can become a "skating rink" in places and must be driven at a slow pace. During the winter months, we usually set out only if the weather is relatively decent and stop as opportunities arise along the way.

Summer

Beginning at the Lake Louise turnoff to the Icefields Parkway, Herbert Lake is worth a stop if the water is calm, sunrise to mid-morning, for panorama images reflecting the Bow Range. We like the sunken logs at the south end of the lake in the clear shallows for use as foreground objects. We won't linger if the conditions aren't right as the real sunrise and early morning events are at Bow Lake and the Peyto Lake Summit. Both offer good sidelight at sunrise to early morning. If the water is calm, we like to focus first on water reflections of Crowfoot Mountain. A good location is the shoreline near the bridge at the Num-Ti-Jah Lodge. This also makes a good foreground object. As the morning progresses, we like to frame the mountain using fireweed along either side of the highway or from the lodge parking lot. The viewpoint at the Peyto Lake Summit is another Rockies icon, framing Calderon Peak and the Mistaya Valley. It's a must stop, best photographed sunrise to mid-afternoon. Often overlooked is the Observation Pond directly across from the highway entrance. We don our rubber boots and walk around the pond looking for reeds and reflection of Observation Peak to the east. Progressing north from Peyto, another overlooked location is Silverhorn Creek. This is best shot evening to sunset with a water blur composition framing Mount Weed.

This would usually be a full day and we'd return to the Lake Louise campground and start at Upper Waterfowl Lake the next day. It's a short walk to the shoreline and, if the lake is calm sunrise to mid-morning, we'd compose a panorama framing Mount Chephren using the rocky shallows, reeds or flowers as

MOUNTAIN GOAT
Icefields Parkway, Alberta

foreground. The two or three roadside viewpoints of the Lower Waterfowl are best late morning, but wind can be an annoyance. The Oxbow can produce a surreal image in early summer if high waters from the Mistaya River have flooded the inner channel. This is best sunrise to early morning as mist often frames Epaulette Mountain, the Kaufmann Peaks and Mount Chrephren.

Another must stop is Mistaya Canyon. One of the best slot-canyons in the Rockies, it is best photographed when overcast due to the wide tonal range produced by the deep crevices. We usually stop at the Beaver Pond about sixteen kilometers up the road. This is a hard to get species at the best of time. Here they are accustomed to human traffic and should be observable in the open either early morning or late evening. A scant two kilometers further on are several roadside access points to the Rampart Ponds. This is a good location anytime except mid-day but must be scouted for shallow ponds, submerged rocks or wildflowers that can be used to anchor images. From here on the wide alluvial gravel channels and beds along the North Saskatchewan River can also be interesting to walk looking for small ponds or wildflowers that can frame Mount Avery.

We learned from our first trip that the next stretch of road is best described as “waterfall alley.” However, of the eight waterfalls and six canyons that dominate this area, two are steep and can be dangerous (Panther and Nigel Falls) and one will likely be dry in the summer and fall (Weeping Wall). We usually opted for the “wimps” tour, focusing on Coleman Creek and the Nigel Pass Trailhead. These are safe and take relatively little time. A good location to explore is the road on the left side of the highway that leads to the first of three small bridges and a deep limestone crevasse. We would look for interesting compositions from here to the third bridge at Nigel Creek where there is an old abandoned car wreck. Nigel Falls is a short walk upstream.

The Columbia Icefield is roughly the midpoint of the Icefields Parkway and the entrance to Jasper National Park. We would generally cruise the highway looking for compelling images from Sunwapta Pass to the Stutfield Glacier Viewpoint. Exploring this area takes time and requires several visits to locate and photograph the surroundings to good advantage. We liked to hike the Wilcox Pass Trail, especially the first four kilometers during the fall. The high alpine meadows house flowers, berry bushes and dwarf trees which make a wonderful foreground to Mount Athabaska, Andromeda and the Snow Dome. It’s a great area for Bighorn Sheep, especially during the late October rut.

There are two good locations just up the road. At Tangle Falls we always take the footpaths to garner more intimate images of the falls and layered limestone formations. There is a trail and short walk at Beauty Creek that leads past

eight waterfalls, culminating at the picturesque Stanley Falls. A short distance north there is a large reflecting pool jammed between the highway and the Sunwapta River. It's an iconic shot! From the campground at Honeymoon Lake there is a splendid view of the Endless Chain Ridge, best photographed mid-day to sunset.

From here on the are many locations roadside next to the Athabaska River to frame images of Mount Christie, Brussels Peak, Mount Fryatt and Whirlpool Peak. A great location to find Mountain Goats is the Kerkeslin rest stop, especially on the hoodoos behind the ridge as they frequently relax on them in the early afternoon. As this is close to Jasper, we would usually end our day at Athabaska Falls. If time permitted, we would hike the perimeter of Horseshoe Lake. It's deep metallic blue water, thin pine forest and colorful slanted rocks all offer great opportunities for abstract images, including reflections. Our favorite location was at the north end during the evening to frame Mount Kerkeslin.

Winter

We usually get an early start and slowly progress north from Lake Louise. This can be a great stretch of road at this time of day as mist and fast-moving fog often bring the peaks in and out of view, creating some surreal vistas after a heavy snowfall. We generally stop at Mosquito Creek and explore the campground and creek area looking for shadows from snow-bound willow and spruce trees or walk the waterways keeping an eye out for open pools with ice detail. Our favorite spot is Bow Lake. Here the Num-Ti Jah Lodge closes early and is boarded up, leaving little opportunity to include the building in its picturesque winter surroundings. The snow covered subalpine meadows between here and Peyto Lake can produce some excellent panorama opportunities if the sidelight casts good shadows amongst the small conifers and moderately undulating terrain. If its early in December, the Peyto Lake viewpoint may still be open. Although the road up is closed in winter, it is an easier and safer walk than using the trail. Again, sunrise to mid-morning is best as Caldron Peak gets the first light.

From here to the north side of the Sunwapta Pass there are many winter vistas that usually catch our eye. Most, however, are late November morning events, especially the Upper and Lower Waterfowl Lakes where open water and ice formations can create exciting foreground objects.

Mistaya Canyon can provide good opportunities almost anytime and is a must stop. It is a short walk from the parking lot to the bridge overlooking the slot canyon backed by Mount Sarbach. However, the signage recommends that you don't progress past the bridge in winter.

From here it is difficult to explore off road as the area may be snowbound and the snow plows have created barriers that are difficult to traverse. If there is a light covering, the area down from the North Saskatchewan River bridge can be productive as the ice formations make an excellent foreground. The Howse Valley Viewpoint can provide either good panorama or telephoto opportunities of Mount Sarbach, Outram, Survey Peak and Erasmus. The Rampart Ponds is worth the time to explore, especially on a sunny day. Here either the snowbound and backlit trees or open water of the North Saskatchewan River provide many opportunities.

We generally don't stop until we reach Parker Ridge. This is a good location for snow drifts and images of the peaks using small trees as foreground objects, especially if some sun and a few clouds are present. A small creek winds down the treed slope farther up the road. A walk down is worthwhile if open water is present.

The Sunwapta Pass leads to the entrance to Jasper National Park. The Columbia Icefields is a spectacular area anytime. We like to hike the road looking for snow drifts and cracked ice formations as foreground. As we continue to drive through this area, Sunwapta Canyon, Tangle Falls and the Stutfield Glacier are worthwhile stops. We usually try the upper reaches of Tangle Falls for more intimate images if the paths are clear and free of slippery sections. When leaving the area, it's impossible to miss the Quartzite Boulder Pile. If the snow plow hasn't decimated the rocks with snow splatter, it's a good location anytime, especially for the abstract minded searching for snow texture and patterns.

BIGHORN SHEEP (MALE)
Icefields Parkway, Alberta

CROWFOOT MOUNTAIN
Num Ti Jah Lodge, Icefields Parkway, Alberta

CROWFOOT MOUNTAIN
Bridge at Num Ti Jah Lodge, Icefields Parkway, Alberta

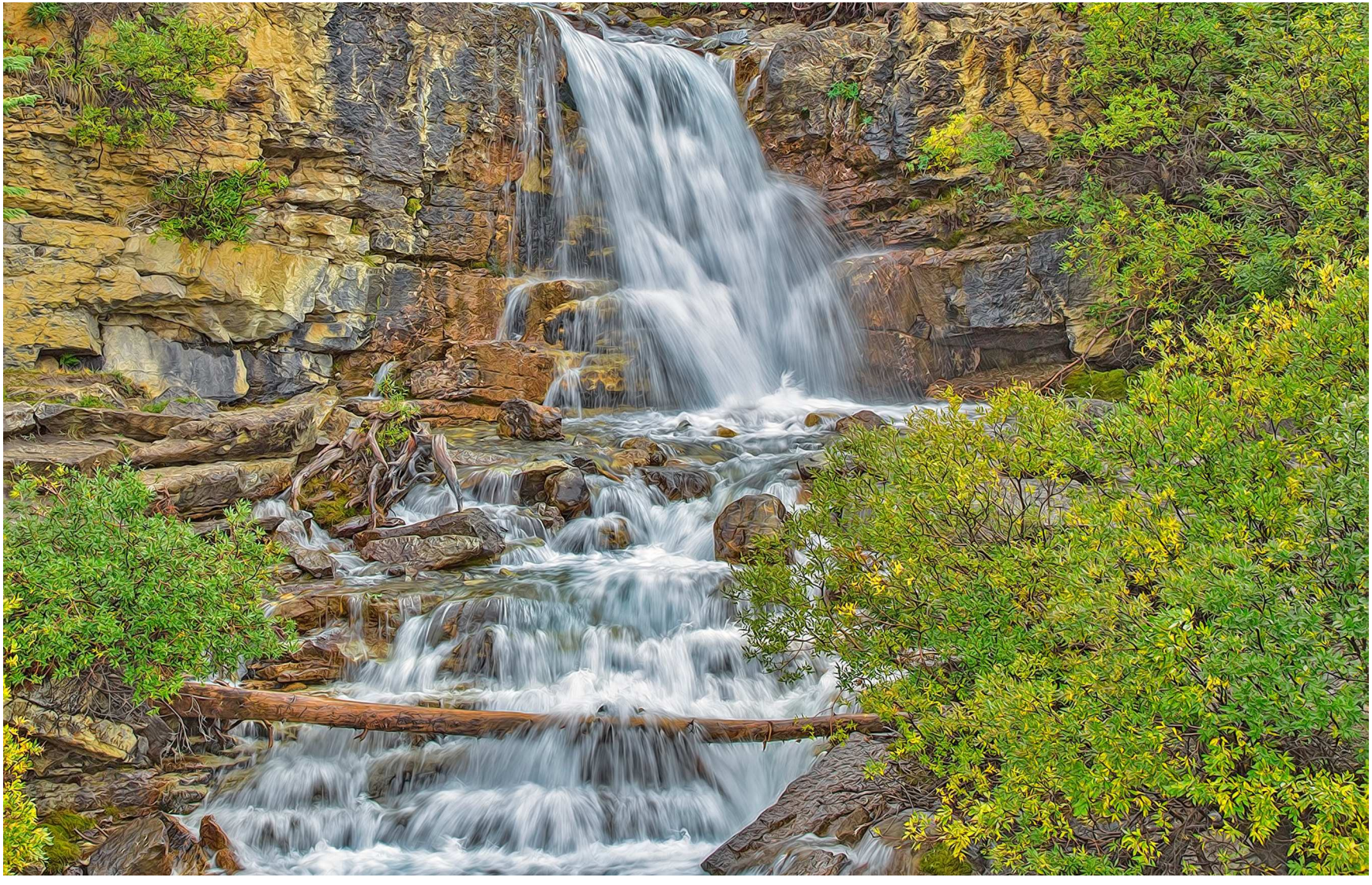
Icefields Parkway near Crowfoot Glacier, Alberta

PEYTO LAKE
Bow Pass Summit, Icefields Parkway, Alberta

WINTER SUNRISE
Icefields Parkway near Mount Fryatt, Alberta

ATHABASKA RIVER SUNRISE
Icefields Parkway, Alberta

PARKER RIDGE
Icefields Parkway, Alberta



TANGLE FALLS
Icefields Parkway, Alberta

ROCKIES MIST
Icefields Parkway near Mistaya Canyon, Alberta

MOOSE (MALE)
Icefields Parkway, Alberta

WOLF
Icefields Parkway, Alberta

MOUNTAIN GOAT
Icefields Parkway, Alberta

Banff National Park

Finally, the heart of the Canadian Rockies! So, where's all the wildlife? We've driven through this area many times and have sighted very few animals. They are, in effect, kept off the highway by high wire fencing to reduce what was once incredible traffic congestion from motorists stopping to take pictures. Moreover, the town is also a conclave, bordered by high wire fences and cattle guards, leaving a paucity of wildlife populating the interior. Our strategy was to ferret out hiking locations off the beaten track where wildlife was known to congregate and plan day trips to photograph target species that were high on our bucket list.

Summer

The locations we decided to visit were best tackled in either the summer (late July and early August) or fall (late September and early October). Spring days, roughly defined as those in May and June, are predominately wet and overcast with the forests and scrub filled with annoying wood ticks. This timing allowed us to take advantage of the summer flowers and fall colors.

A good beginning to a day outing is along the Lake Minnewanka Scenic Drive not only for landscape opportunities but also to come across Bighorn Sheep. A mainstay of this route is Cascade Meadows, good sunrise to mid-morning and evening to sunset. Here we were almost assured that the open meadow would be punctuated with ox-eyed daisies and perhaps the odd Elk, making a colorful and dramatic foreground to Mounts Rundle and Inglismaldie. The sites at Johnson Lake and Two Jacks Lake offer similar sunrise to mid-morning opportunities. Johnson Lake is a good choice as it is sheltered and usually placid. At the former location, we usually tried to frame the Fairholme Range or walk roughly one and a half kilometers to the end of the lake to capture Cascade Mountain. At Two Jacks there were several good spots to frame both Cascade Mountain and Mount Rundle.

BLACK BEAR
Bow Valley Parkway, Banff National Park, Alberta

We always enjoyed a hike on the The Upper Bankhead as it leads to an old coal mining town. It's then an easy four kilometer walk on the C-Level Cirque trail to a rock pile housing Pika and Hoary Marmots. A little down the road is the Lower Bankhead. This is a must stop as the abandoned anthracite operation offers lines of disintegrating coal carts and old pilings that make interesting foreground objects to frame the distant mountains. There are also many meandering streams where we could compose blurred water images in meadows strewn with wild flowers and some spectacular views.

There are also good locations within the town of Banff to either begin or cap-off a day. Although vistas of Mount Rundle and the Bow Valley can be gleaned sunrise to mid-morning from several locations along Tunnel Mountain Road, we feel it is best at the Hoodoos in late afternoon from the third platform along the walkway. A must is Cascade Gardens, either mid-morning or evening. This is a sculptured rock garden with mountain views where flowers make a good foreground in spring and summer. Alternatively, late afternoon to sunset can produce stunning images at the meadow, known as the "green spot," on the Mount Norquay Scenic Drive. We liked to use the rock wall at the parking lot as a foreground to Mount Rundle and the Goat Range. This is also a good location for Bighorn Sheep in the summer and fall. To us, Vermillion Lakes is a winter location, but many photographers love the late evening light along this route at this time of year, especially if the west face of Mount Rundle is encapsulated in any kind of dramatic cloud structure.

We feel the Bow Valley Parkway can be disappointing. There are better locations in Jasper if you are looking for abstracts of, say, aspen groves or moving water. As such, we generally bypass the opportunities offered at the Muleshoe or Johnson Canyon. There is a gem, however, sunrise to mid-morning just west of Hillsdale Meadows at Pilot Pond where a wide-angle lens can capture placid images of the lake framing the forest and Pilot Mountain. Although the bridge at Castle Junction is a must winter location, it was a favorite of ours in early August as there are usually Osprey fledging from the nest on the center span. Our tactic here was to sit atop a ladder that we placed on the canopy of our truck to help compose images with a better view of the nest. Near the end of the road, Morant's Curve is an iconic location to capture classic Rockies images of the Bow Range using train tracks as a foreground. It's best mid-day for side light and can be a killer location for winter images.

A great day hike is Sunshine Meadows just north of town where alpine trails offer the opportunity to capture smaller indigenous species such as a Columbian Ground Squirrel. This is a great walk amid alpine lakes, lush fields of wild flowers and resplendent vegetation. The Laryx Lake, Grizzley Lake loop is slight over five kilometers and

well worth the effort. Our research indicated a good location for Hoary Marmot is the Stanley Peak Glacier. It's a day hike from the trailhead which is west of Castle Junction in the Kootenay National Forest. Although it's a relatively easy climb with moderate switchbacks, poor weather kept us from completing the assent. We abandoned a second attempt as hikers descending warned us that too many bears were foraging on berries that were growing close to the trail edge. The Hoary Marmot was becoming a target species that was constantly eluding us!

Winter

Our objective was to begin to produce an anthology of photographs depicting specific locations in the Canadian Rockies from a seasonal perspective. What better place to start than winter as we felt the contrast from the summer months was at least a gauge from what we experienced during the high traffic tourist season. Notwithstanding, from what we had read, nothing prepared us for the actual winter experience, especially as it applied to the conditions we found in October and the early part of December. During the former period, we found only a dusting of snow to contrast the open water creeks we hoped to photograph. We caught the odd wildlife roadside, but nothing really grabbed our attention despite the miles we put in. Early December was another matter. Deep snow covered most of the popular locations and much of the open water that remained was clogged with ice jams. Snowplows created high roadside snow banks and at one location, the Quartzite Boulder Pile on the Icefield Parkway, splattered snow over what could have been an excellent opportunity to capture some abstract images. To our surprise, the Bow Valley Parkway to Lake Louise was clear. Baker’s Creek was completely snow bound and a bust, but Morant’s Corner provided vistas mid-morning that took our breath away. If we had one recommendation to travelling through this area in December, it would be to carry a light pair of snowshoes as the off-road potential to capture good sidelight with foreground objects is limitless. This also applies for the Icefields Parkway and the Jasper winter routes.

Banff is a relatively small area to cover in winter but requires time. The one advantage to this time of year is that the sun is low angle, creating good shadow detail. Most locations are roadside or within a short walking distance from our vehicle. This makes for a convenient and comfortable driving visit, stopping for photography only if the right weather conditions prevail.

A good place to start is Cascade Ponds at sunrise. There are two bridges that make good foreground objects and can be striking as the early morning light casts shadows on the fresh snow.

A good early to mid-morning location is the Bow River bridge. This area is side-lit in winter at sunrise and front-lit at sunset, exposing the castellated peaks. By early December the ice jams and snow leave little open water but what remains makes a good foreground for an image of Castle Mountain, especially looking upriver. Downstream provides eastern views of Sawback Ridge or the Massive Ranges.

We usually continue down the last leg of the Bow Valley Parkway to Lake Louise. Just past Baker Creek there are clearings on the left that provide a tremendous perspective of Temple Mountain, especially if a recent snowfall is still clinging to the tree line. We usually don't doddle as the real vista for this time of day is Morant's Corner. It's a classic image of the Rockies railway if side light and cloud structure cooperate.

A great way to end the day is to head for the Vermillion Lakes and the west face of Mount Rundle. This is a mid-afternoon to sunset location. Evening light creates a great setting for shoreline images from the three lakes. There is at least one warm spring on the second lake that creates a pocket of open water during the winter, providing a crystalline-edged reflecting pool and some feathered ice. Nearby is a canal that provides a good contour. The stumps at the end of the road offer a good panorama opportunity. There is usually some open water and frost covered vegetation along the irregular ice-fringed shoreline.

Another winter approach is to start with a drive over Tunnel Mountain in the early morning looking for vistas of Mount Rundle and Cascade Mountain. We leave the Hoodoos viewpoint for later in the day. Then it's off to Canmore to catch the early morning light on the east face of Mount Rundle. The best location is the Bow River. Trails provide access to the river and it's simply a matter of finding an ice formation that makes an interesting foreground. There are often Elk grazing along the Three Sisters Parkway.

Heading back to Banff, we try to take advantage of several early to late afternoon and evening locations, although it's impossible to fit them all in at one go. If there is a good cloud formation, we like the bridge at the end of Banff Avenue, especially at river level with a view of Cascade Mountain. It's fun to play with the bridge stonework and use its length to create various perspectives. Just down the road is Bow Falls. Here we like to walk the river looking for interesting ice formations where a water blur can create exciting abstractions. As mentioned earlier, the Hoodoos viewpoint on Tunnel Mountain is also a good late afternoon choice to capture the grandeur of the Bow and Spray valleys. Dusk is also a good time to visit nearby Surprise Corner if you are looking for a classic winter image of the Banff Springs Hotel.

Before leaving the town of Banff, our research indicated that a good location anytime during winter is the Cave and Basin. To our extreme disappointment, we found it closed, although it may have been a temporary situation. There are supposedly four short hikes (Discovery Loop, Marsh Boardwalk, Marsh Loop and Sundance Trail) that are a must to scout in winter as the condensing steam from the hot springs often coats the surrounding trees with ice, forming abstract shapes that can produce a plethora of interesting images.

CASTLE MOUNTAIN SUNRISE
Banff National Park near the Bow Junction Bridge, Alberta

MORANT'S CORNER
Bow Valley Parkway near Lake Louise, Alberta

CASCADE MOUNTAIN STORM
Banff National Park on Recreation Boulevard, Alberta

CASCADE MOUNTAIN SUNSET
Banff National Park at the Bow River Bridge, Alberta

MOUNT RUNDLE EAST FACE – SUMMER
Cascade Ponds, Banff National Park, Alberta

MOUNT RUNDLE WEST FACE – WINTER
Vermillion Lakes, Banff National Park, Alberta

BRIDGE AT CASCADE PONDS – WINTER
Banff National Park, Alberta

BRIDGE AT CASCADE PONDS – SUMMER
Banff National Park, Alberta

ASPEN GROVE

Muleshoe Picnic Area, Bow Valley Parkway, Alberta

BOW RIVER
Canmore, Alberta

OSPREY NEST
Bridge at Castle Junction, Bow Valley Parkway, Alberta

OSPREY
Castle Junction,
Bow Valley Parkway, Alberta

OSPREY
Castle Junction,
Bow Valley Parkway, Alberta

OSPREY
Castle Junction,
Bow Valley Parkway, Alberta

WHITE-TAILED DEER
Kootenay National Forest, Alberta

COLUMBIAN GROUND SQUIRREL
Sunshine Meadows near Larynx Lake,
Banff National Park, Alberta

OSPREY
Castle Junction,
Bow Valley Parkway, Alberta

Lake Louise

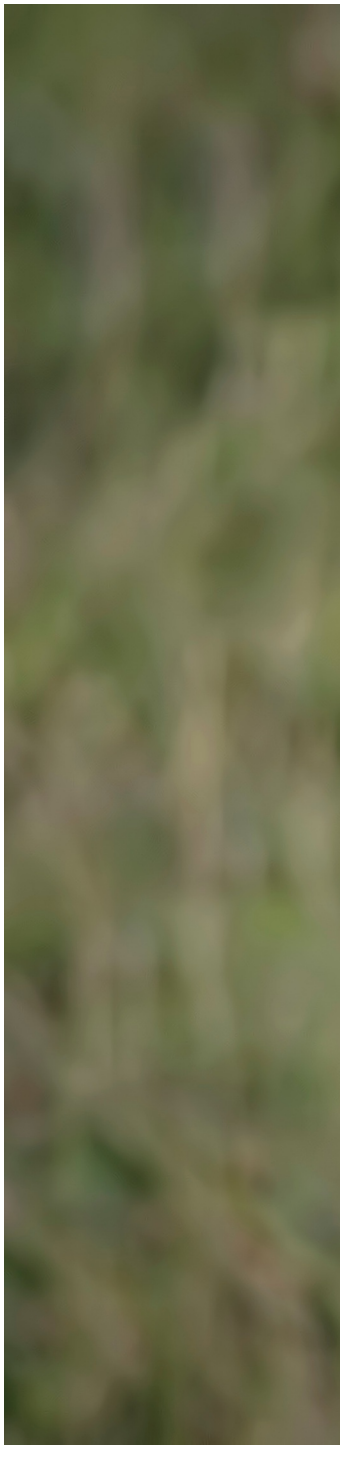
No trip to the Canadian Rockies is complete without a stop at Lake Louise. Our favorite location was Moraine Lake where a short walk up the “rock pile” reveals the classic and much photographed view of the Wenkchemna Peaks. Shadows darken much of the forest, lake and lower slopes, demanding a bracketed HDR approach to reveal enough detail to produce a good image. However, it can also be a bust as haze produced by wind and forest fires in the summer combine to obscure what is a majestic vista.

From here there are three hikes that can produce stunning images. The best, but most strenuous, is a three-kilometer trek up the Larch Valley in the fall. An easier venue of similar length is the walk to Consolation Lakes along the Babel Creek trail. Here on the lower slopes we found moss and lichen boulders surrounding small pools that frame Mount Babel. Lastly, there is a trail that terminates at the end of Moraine Lake where there is a small inlet stream where it’s easy to capture a water blur framing the forest and peaks as background. To us, it’s the Larch Valley all the way to the bank! We would always wait for a group as the as we always encountered bears along the way.

WENKCHEMNA PEAKS
Moraine Lake near Lake Louise, Alberta

Kananaskis Country

The entrance to Kananaskis Country and the Highwood Wildlife Sanctuary is just outside the eastern Banff park boundry. Here there are no high fence enclosures, the mountain scenery is breathtaking and ample opportunity exists for Rocky Mountain and Bighorn Sheep along the highway. The Kananaskis Country houses many good locations and can be a veritable treasure when the weather changes rapidly. The Mount Lorette Ponds in late morning produces wonderful reflections and is crystal clear with great potential for combining interesting foreground objects with mountain backdrops. Wedge Pond is an early morning site where alpenglow, mist and Mount Kidd reflections are all possibilities. Peter Lougheed Provincial Park houses two good late morning locations. The first is Panorama Point overlooking Lower Kananaskis Lake and the second is along the left trail to Upper Kananaskis Lake. If the latter location is calm, the trail walk can cough up some good reflections of Hawke Island. Again, if the weather is sunny and calm, a spectacular afternoon site is the reflection of Mount Kidd from the Galatea Beaver Pond. Finally, the waterfall at Cat Creek, although not large and a long walk, is an interesting stop. Photographers at this site told us Troll Falls is a better location, especially in early Spring and Winter when snow is still prevalent.



ROCKY MOUNTAIN SHEEP
Highwood Wildlife Sanctuary near Storm Creek, Alberta

HAWKE ISLAND

Upper Kananaskis Lake, Peter lougheed Provincial Park, Alberta

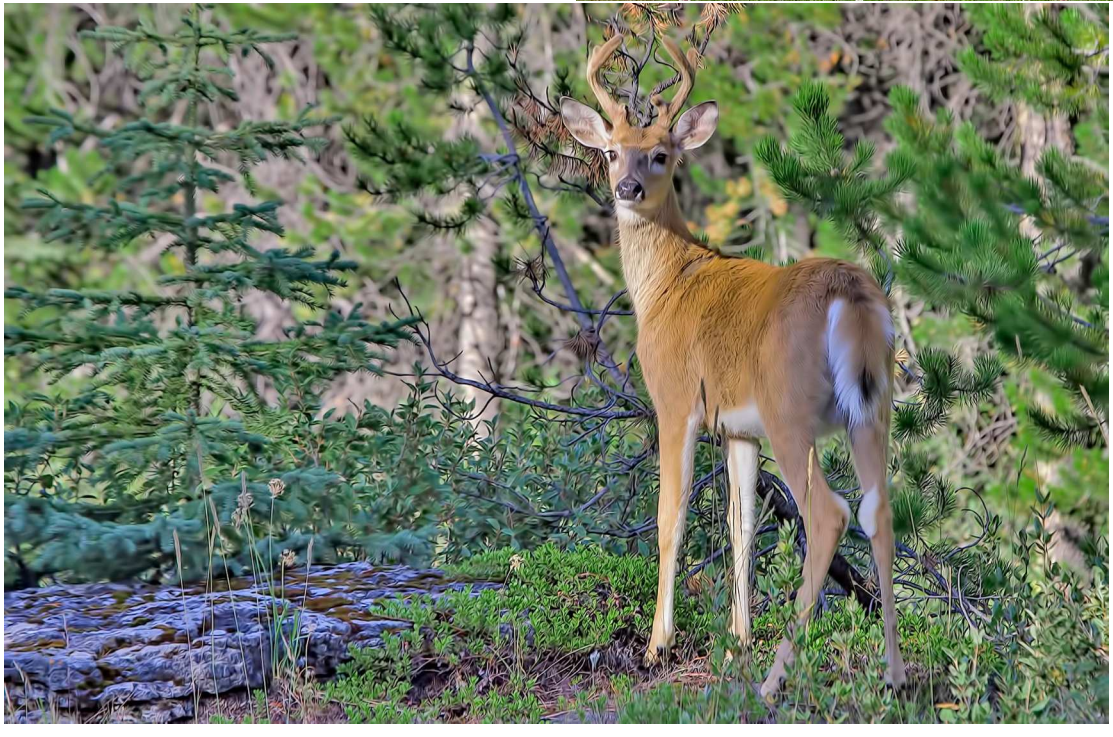
MOUNT KIDD
Galatea Beaver Pond, Kananaskis Country, Alberta

LENTICULAR CLOUDS AT PANORAMA POINT
Lower Kananaskis Lake, Peter lougheed Provincial Park, Alberta

MOUNT LORETTE PONDS
Kananaskis Country, Alberta

EVENING ALPENGLOW
Kananaskis Country, Alberta

ROCKY MOUNTAIN SHEEP
Highwood Wildlife Sanctuary,
Storm Creek, Alberta



WHITE-TAILED DEER
Kananaskis Country, Alberta

Waterton Lakes National Park

The last stop on this route before reaching the United States border is Waterton Lakes National Park. The drive between Kananaskis and Waterton is typical Alberta foothills farming country. We are always on the lookout for old machinery, buckboards, fresh hay bales, dilapidated houses and barns. All make for great fare if public access is available.

As we entered the park, it was evident that Black Bear and Mule Deer were prevalent, making for an exciting first impression. Our first stop was Cameron Lake along the Akamina Parkway where we found migrating passerines in abundance, including White-Winged Crossbill, Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher and American Pipit. We were surprised to come across a Moose at Akamina Lake which has great backdrops but is difficult to position for light as there is little room to maneuver along the cramped shoreline.

The rock and water formations at Red Rock Canyon, especially above and below the bridge, can occupy hours framing abstract compositions. It's easy to sight Black Bear enjoying late season berries on the open hillside meadows along the Red Rock Parkway.

MULE DEER (MALE)
Waterton, Alberta

SUNRISE STORM
Upper Waterton Lake, Alberta

HAY BALES
Twin Butte, Alberta

GOLDEN-MANTLED GROUND SQUIRREL,
Red Rock Canyon,
Waterton Lakes National Park,
Alberta

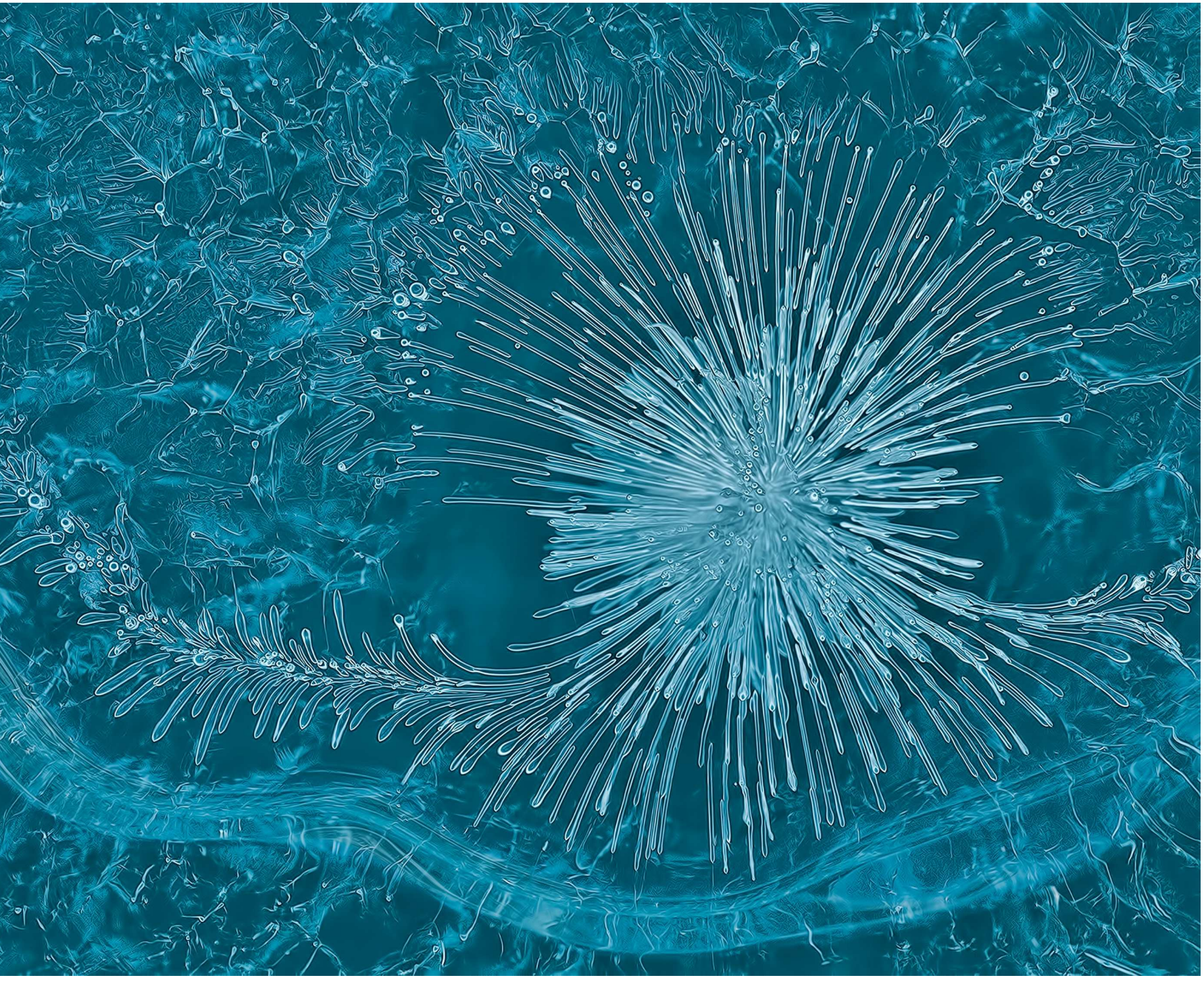
COMMON GOLDENEYE (JUVENILE),
Cameron Lake,
Waterton Lakes National Park,
Alberta

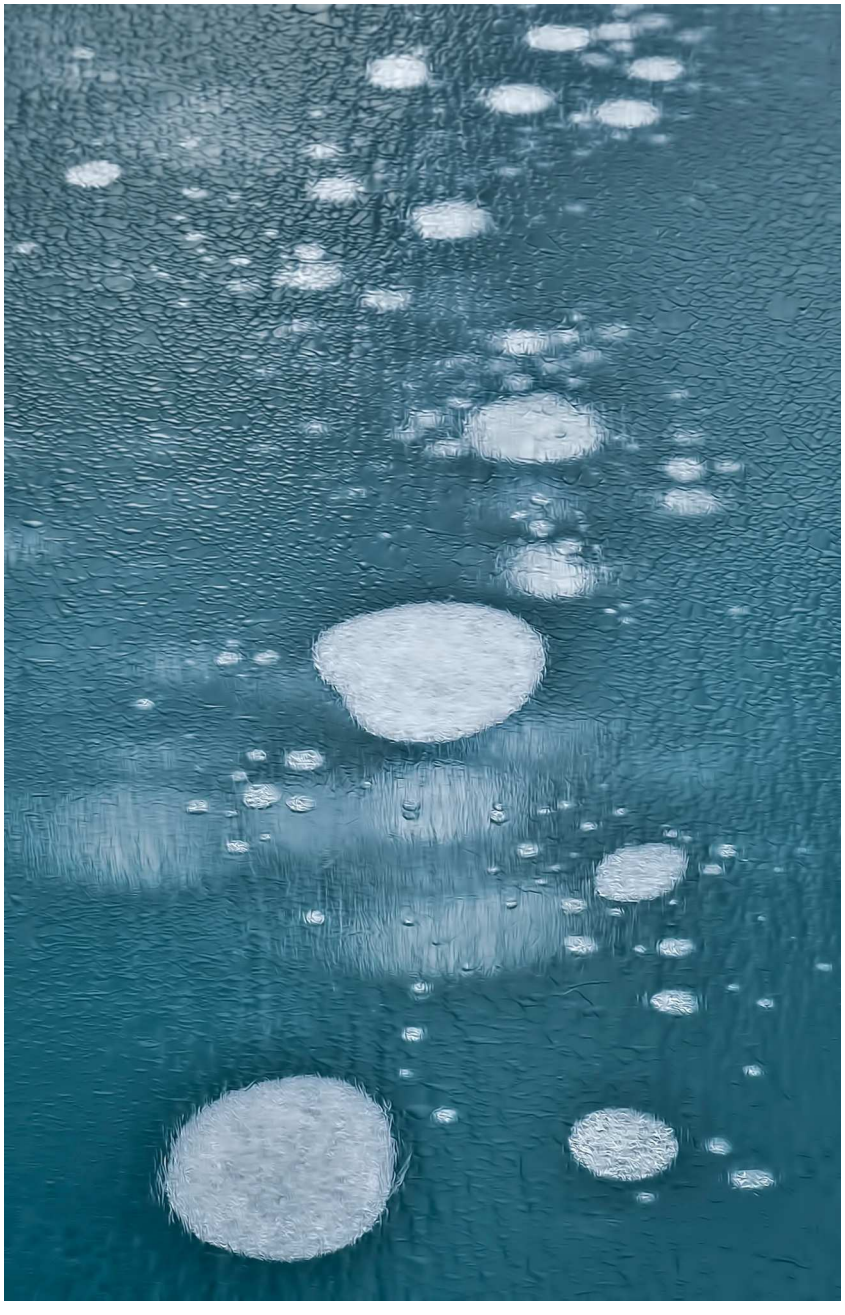
MOOSE (FEMALE)
Akamina Lake, Waterton Lakes National Park, Alberta

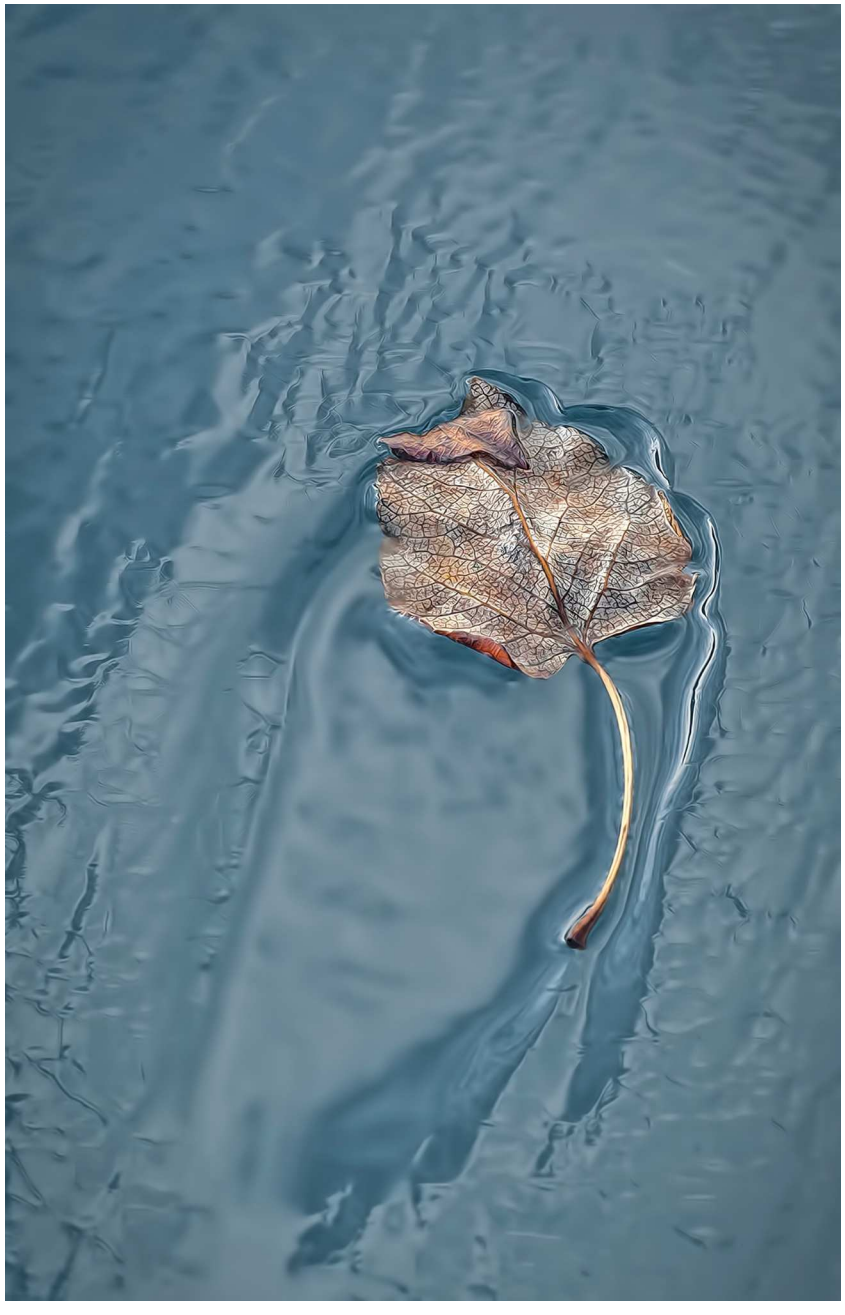
The Kootenay Plains

There is a remote but interesting area in the Bighorn Wildlands known as the Kootenay Plains. It begins on the David Thompson Highway at the Saskatchewan Crossing midway along the Icefields Parkway. Here the eastern slopes get little precipitation, but the wind and low winter temperature combine to create spectacular snow and ice formations. The centerpiece is Abraham Lake, a man-made waterway that sprouts frozen methane bubbles, cracks and ice jams that make interesting abstracts or foreground objects to frame the mountains, especially at sunrise and sunset. There are many locations along the North Saskatchewan River where the open shoreline or drifts on the sand and mudflats create interesting vistas that continually challenged our composition skills. Our foray to this area was during the heart of winter when it was extremely cold with strong winds. Walking the frozen lake shoreline required crampons and the strong wind made it difficult to hold on to our tripods. Notwithstanding, it was great fun isolating abstract crystal formations in the ice.

ICE CRYSTALS
Windy Point, Abraham Lake, Alberta







FROZEN METHANE BUBBLES AND LEAF
Windy Point, Abraham Lake, Alberta

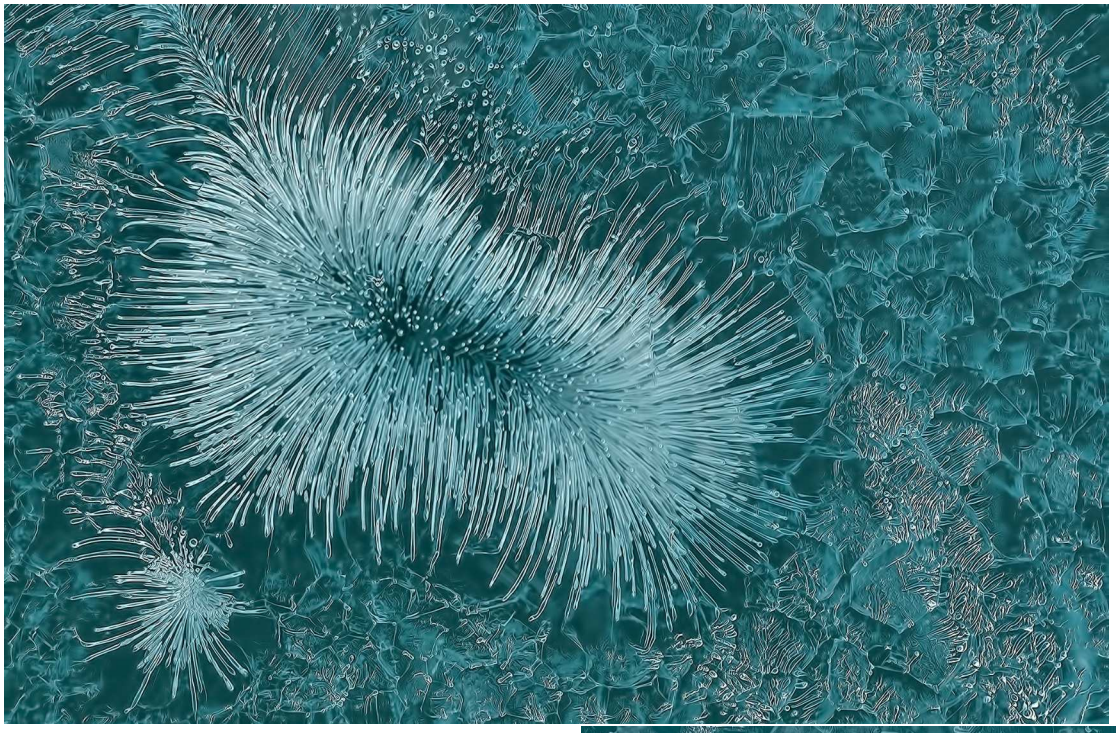
FROZEN METHANE BUBBLES
Hoodoo Creek Outlet, Abraham Lake, Alberta

WINDY POINT RIDGE
Abraham Lake, Alberta

ABRAHAM LAKE
Kootenay Plains, Alberta

SUNRISE – ELLIOT PEAK
Abraham Lake, Kootenay Plains, Alberta

ABRAHAM LAKE
Cline River Bridge, Kootenay Plains, Alberta



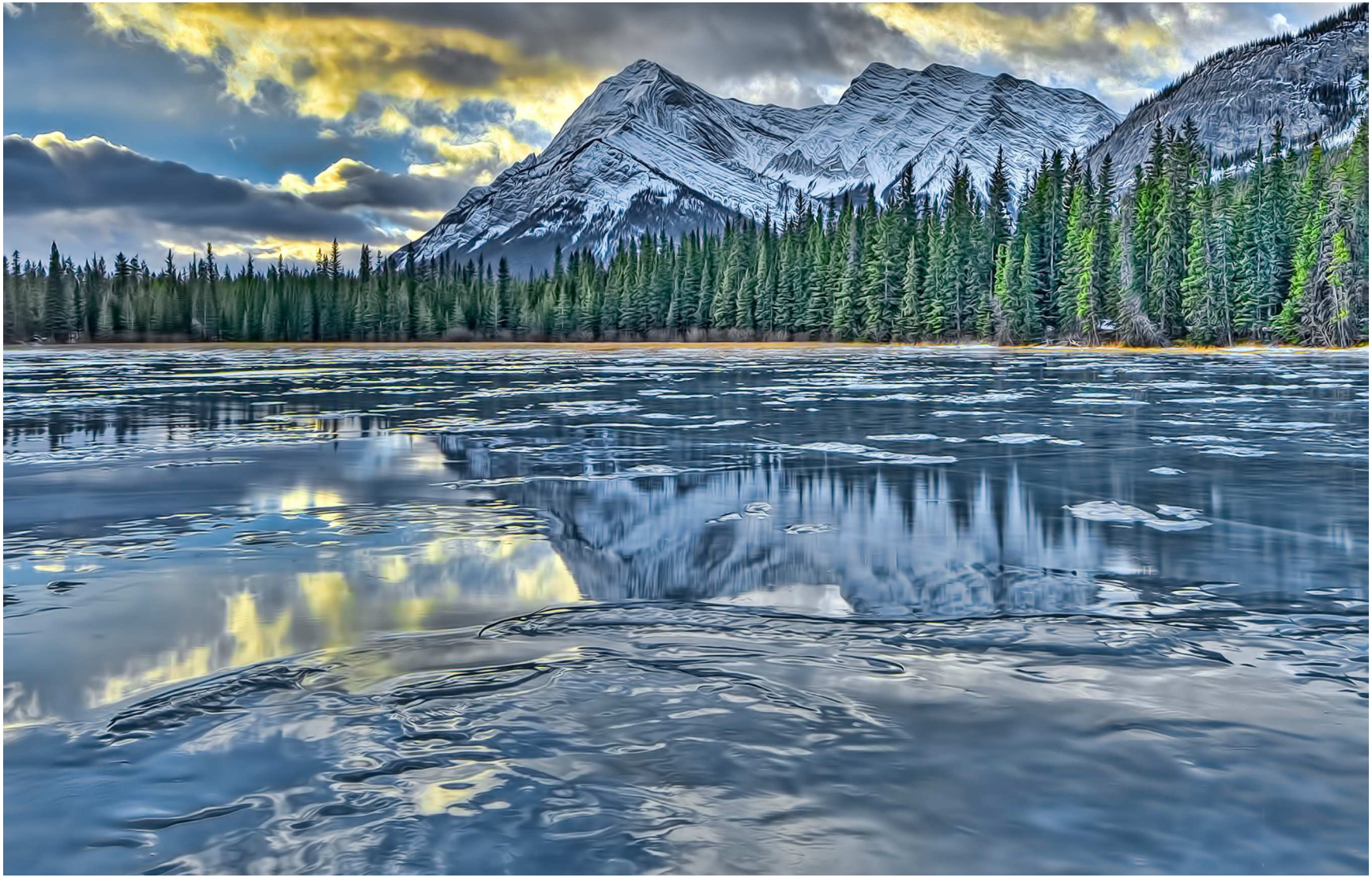
ICE CRYSTALS
Windy Point, Abraham Lake, Alberta

ICE CRYSTALS
Windy Point, Abraham Lake, Alberta

SUNRISE – PREACHER'S POINT
Abraham Lake, Alberta

SUNSET – WINDY POINT
Abraham Lake, Alberta

SUNRISE – KRISTA PEAK
Abraham Lake, Alberta



SUNRISE – ELLIOT PEAK
Whitegoat Lake, Abraham Plains, Alberta

Birds of Prey Nature Center

This is the largest raptor rehabilitation center in Canada, situated on a 70-acre wetland in Coaldale, Alberta. It's a rare opportunity to handle and photograph indigenous raptors in an intimate setting, including hawks, falcons, eagles and owls. The “hawk walk” is a must for photographers looking to capture intimate portraits as the pathways are filled with birds of prey sitting on their perches only feet away from visitors. These birds are all in various stages of training and receive lots of exercise in daily flying programs. We were heartbroken to learn that over a quarter of the birds perished in the summer of 2018 after contacting the West Nile Virus.

BALD EAGLE
Birds of Prey Nature Center, Coaldale, Alberta

GREAT HORNED OWL
Birds of Prey Nature Center,
Coaldale, Alberta

SHORT-EARED OWL
Birds of Prey Nature Center,
Coaldale, Alberta

BARN OWL
Birds of Prey Nature Center, Coaldale, Alberta

RED-TAILED HAWK (HARLAN'S MORPH)
Birds of Prey Nature Center, Coaldale, Alberta

SWAINSON'S HAWK
Birds of Prey Nature Center, Coaldale, Alberta

BALD EAGLE (JUVENILE)
Birds of Prey Nature Center, Coaldale, Alberta

GOLDEN EAGLE (JUVENILE)
Birds of Prey Nature Center, Coaldale, Alberta

BARN OWL
Birds of Prey Nature Center, Coaldale, Alberta

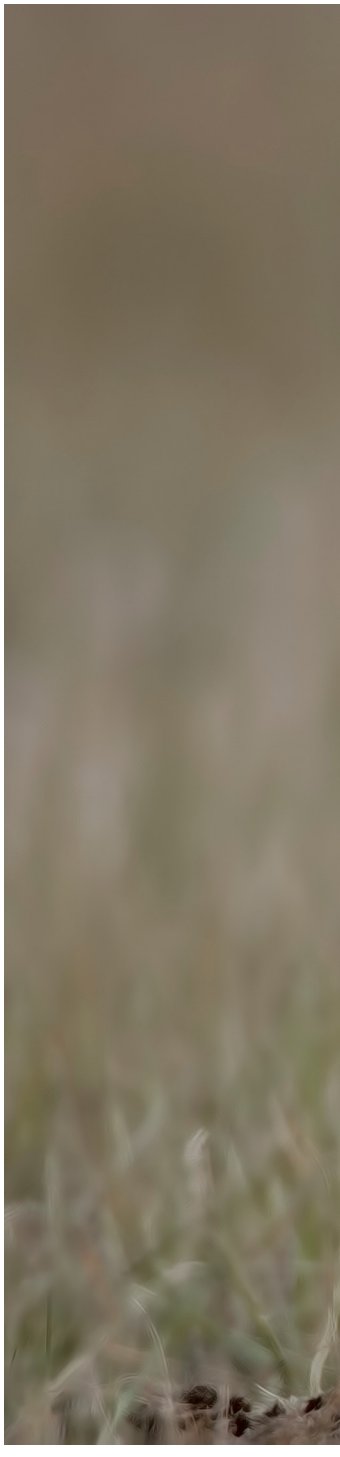
BALD EAGLE
Birds of Prey Nature Center, Coaldale, Alberta

Southern Saskatchewan

Photographing classic rural landscapes that depict links to the past can be a daunting task in terms of ferreting out locations and determining which season and time of day would make for a productive visit. Fortunately, western North America is blessed with several great areas that still house opportunities that provide a glimpse of early homestead life. Certainly, scenes from the Washington Palouse or Alberta foothills come to mind. The area around southern Saskatchewan is no exception. It is a remarkable region, encompassing the whole of the Wood Mountain Uplands. Here the hills and grasslands stretch from the Frenchman River Valley to the Big Muddy, housing signs of an early prairie heritage including abandoned homesteads, rusting farm machinery and decaying grain elevators that sit in contrast to the modern culture of mega farms, oil and gas extraction and the odd bit of ranching. It's an area of contradictions with a landscape that challenged our photography skills, especially when the much-vaunted prairie weather produces a sudden thunder storm or billowing clouds that can create dramatic sunrise and sunset perspectives.

Cypress Hills

We chose to visit in early September with the hope that the harvest would be getting underway, some classic weather would materialize and that a little serendipity might bless our travels. We began in the Cypress Hills and crept slowly east along "The Traders Route," the historic name for what today is known as the Heartland Heritage Highway. Our tact was to focus on what can loosely be described as "ghost towns," or small out-of-the-way bergs that were the mainstay of early Saskatchewan settlement. Here we looked for old barns, abandoned farm machinery, rusting vehicles or any setting that would depict a hint of the old west.



BLACK-TAILED PRAIRIE DOGS
Grasslands National Park near Val Marie, Saskatchewan

Starting at Maple Creek we explored the Cypress Hills area along back roads looking for colorful aspen groves. Our objective was the Fort Walsh National Historic site. This is a great place to capture a panorama of the fort that incorporates both the surrounding hills and the adjacent cemetery. We discovered a great location to end the day was a sunset visit to Bald Butte.

Grasslands National Park

Robsart and Ravenscrag brought our first real contact with the past, providing opportunities to compose old vehicles and abandoned houses in what turned out to be the only stormy day we encountered on our trip. Our destination that evening was the village of Val Marie where we stayed at the Convent bed-and-breakfast, a well preserved 1939 high school originally operated by the Sisters of Assumption. This is the entrance to Grasslands National Park, and we had fun at a Black-Tailed Prairie Dog colony as we entered the west block of the park. Unfortunately, the Bison failed to cooperate, and we were left with a cloudless sky and a vastness that defied even an interesting panorama as endless prairie grass doesn't make for much of a subject! Later in the day we back tracked to Orkney to look for an abandoned church, then proceeded to Masefield where we found hay bales made a great backdrop to the remnants of an old homestead.

Killdeer Badlands and Castle Butte

The next day, as we headed towards the east block Killdeer Badlands, serendipity finally kicked in as we encountered owners willing to let us photograph homestead properties that still housed old barns and abandoned vehicles. This leg of our journey took us through the Fife Lake region and Castle Butte where the Big Muddy Valley produced not only some good landscapes but also harvesting perspectives of many working combines. As we progressed toward Regina, we visited some old stone churches in Heward and Davin.

Regina Area

Regina was a stopover that afforded us the opportunity to take in the Mossbank area, arriving early for a sunrise image of the granary at Briercrest. The highway is home to old vehicles and homesteads that are great to capture in

morning light, especially the Bay Island School just before Old Wives Lake as it is next to a wheat field that produces an interesting perspective if it hasn't been harvested yet. A must trip to the north east of Regina is the Qu'Appelle Valley, especially the Anglican church near Craven and the abandoned Bethlehem Lutheran ruins near Southey.

Great Sand Hills

To wind up our visit, we traveled north west to the Great Sand Hills through a treasure of homestead heritage country beginning at Neidpath. This is a must location for the old grain elevators, an abandoned church and a vehicle bone yard on the outskirts of town. We were fortunate to encounter a sudden storm and sunset that produced some dramatic images as we progressed north toward Leader.

The sand hills are just that, small outcroppings that are accessible south of Sceptre and best photographed in early morning light. However, the slopes are also used for “carpet tobogganing" so we spent considerable time ferreting out decent compositions. Along Grid Road 321 there are good early morning opportunities, the best at the John Heck 1913 homestead from road side.

Leaving southern Saskatchewan was tough. This was an excursion where we purposely focused on the prairie landscape, looking for compositions that would hopefully create a link to our early settlement heritage. It’s mostly gone with the advent of mega farming, but gems do exist, and it was a trip that we thoroughly enjoyed.

ABANDONED TRUCK
Lethbridge, Alberta

SUNSET STORM
Val Marie, Saskatchewan

ABANDONED COMBINE
Fife Lake, Saskatchewan

BUCKLING BARN
Seven Bridges Road near Lumsden, Saskatchewan

SUNSET – WHEAT FIELD
Liebenthal, Saskatchewan

SUNSET – CANOLA FIELD
Rockglen, Saskatchewan

GRAIN ELEVATOR
Wood Mountain, Saskatchewan

SUNRISE
Briercrest, Saskatchewan

ABANDONED VEHICLE
Neidpath, Saskatchewan

ABANDONED VEHICLES
Scotsguard, Saskatchewan

KILLDEER BADLANDS

East Block, Badlands National Park, Saskatchewan

THE GREAT SAND HILLS
Sceptre, Saskatchewan

ABANDONED THRESHING MACHIME
Scotsguard, Saskatchewan

ABANDONED GENERAL STORE
Candiac, Saskatchewan

ABANDONED FARM HOUSE
Robsart, Saskatchewan

ABANDONED VEHICLE
McCord, Saskatchewan

ABANDONED FARM
McCord, Saskatchewan

ABANDONED TRUCK
Robsart, Saskatchewan

ABANDONED VEHICLE
Ravenscrag, Saskatchewan

ABANDONED VEHICLE
Fife Lake, Saskatchewan

ABANDONED TRACTOR
Dollard, Saskatchewan

ABANDONED VEHICLE
Neidpath, Saskatchewan

PIXEL BENDER OIL PAINTING
BIGHORN SHEEP – "NAP TIME"

Our Photography Journey...

The adventure began during the latter part of our careers when we started to ponder the question of what to do during our retirement. We had no objective in mind but finally settled on the combination of travel and nature photography as something that might be an interesting pastime. After months of agonizing research, we became early adopters of Canon's transition from film to digital camera bodies. What started as an overwhelming introduction to an emerging and complex technology soon mushroomed into somewhat of an obsession, especially as we progressed from wandering around local habitat searching for compliant subjects to attracting birds to "sets" we designed and photographed from a blind in our back yard. As we became more proficient behind the camera, we decided to focus our attention on travelling to locations in western North America, targeting sites known for outstanding bird, wildlife and natural landscape photography. Although our approach to stalking subjects "in-the-wild" produced some compelling images, we soon learned that most eye-catching exposures are the result of set-piece creations where subject behavior and ambient light are manipulated in a controlled setting. This is most readily achieved when photographing birds. The concept of "Birds as Art" was first introduced by Arthur Morris and subsequently taken to unprecedented heights as an artform by Alan Murphy. Both photographers raised the bar for what eventually became a photographic standard and one we passionately pursued as an adjunct to the traditional approach of simply searching for subjects in their natural habitat.

Not surprisingly, we were soon overcome with the urge to display and share our images. We began by producing web graphics and hosting an educational blog online for beginner photographers. As the sophistication of the digital darkroom evolved, a host of programs began to appear that elevated post-processing techniques to a new and exciting level. This led us to not only improve our web graphics but also to experiment in-house with the production of large prints on specialty media, including textured watercolor paper and canvas. During this time, we became overwhelmed by the emerging world of digital art, a niche genre designed to create stunning special effects from photographs. At the time of publication, our favorites were Pixel Bender, a Photoshop plug-in with an Oil Paint filter and LucisArt, a standalone program that creates incredible watercolor renditions. Both programs became mainstays in our Photoshop workflow.

This book is our self-published attempt to showcase, in print, a selection of photographs from our Alberta travels, including a quick foray into southern Saskatchewan.

Alberta

Nature Photography

Bird, wildlife and natural landscape photography is an enjoyable and absorbing pastime. It's also an immense amount of fun! The advent of the digital camera and image enhancement software has had a significant impact on what was once the domain of professionals and serious amateurs. Today, it’s an accessible and affordable hobby, no matter what your level of entry.

Like most photographers, we were soon overcome with the urge to display and share our images. We began with web graphics of photographs captured at outstanding locations throughout western North America, including: Alaska, Alberta Arizona, British Columbia, California, Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, Nunavut, Oregon, Saskatchewan, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, Wyoming, the Yukon and several sites we visited in eastern Canada.

This book contains selected images from our travels throughout Alberta, including a short but exciting excursion to southern Saskatchewan.