

MICHAEL CLARK
PHOTOGRAPHY



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Inspiration and the Creative Spark

ON THE RUN WITH THE CREATIVE URGE



In the past few years I have spread my wings photographically so to speak and have focused on a variety of subjects, styles and genres of photography. I have shot much more lifestyle and portraiture than ever before, only shooting rock climbing and adventure sports occasionally. In 2007, I shot rock climbing on only three occasions which was a radical departure from the previous eleven years. On those three occasions I got portfolio quality images everytime I picked up the camera but still I felt the need to shake things up and as a result I have a much more varied portfolio which is apparent in my revamped website.

Earlier this year, while covering the Patagonia Expedition Race I realized my passion for adventure has not waned. Shooting lifestyle and portraiture is very rewarding, both photographically and financially, but the reason I became a photographer was to create awe-inspiring adventure images. And while in Patagonia I realized that adventure will always be a driving force in my photography career. That doesn't mean I won't continue to shoot lifestyle images and portraits -- just that I'll also be sure to make time for rowdy adventure sports images.

In the last few years, I have learned quite a few skills from shooting lifestyle and portraiture that can be applied (and have been) to adventure sports images, especially when it comes to artificial lighting. I don't think it is news to anyone that the outdoor world is quite small. I felt like I needed to expand my horizons beyond the outdoor genre so that I could work for higher end clients and improve my overall photographic skills. Of course with my roots firmly established in the outdoor genre I won't be straying too far, but I will be looking to take my own work to new heights.

Part of spreading my wings has also been looking at a lot of work produced by photog-

raphers both past and present. I find myself inspired by many photographers these days, most of whom are not in the outdoor world at all. In particular Platon, Frank Ockenfels III, Sandro, Albert Watson, Dan Winters and Frans Lanting are all artists whose work I keep a look out for. Platon's latest portrait of Willie Nelson for Texas Monthly is a stunning example of a great portrait.

This issue of the newsletter includes a full article on my experiences covering the Patagonia Expedition Race earlier this year and a perspective article on *Finding Inspiration*. Both should give you a some insight into the world of professional photography and what we go through to get the image. The theme for this issue of the newsletter seems to be inspiration, mostly because my recent trip in Patagonia inspired me so much to not only pursue my adventure photography with renewed gusto but also to work even harder while shooting lifestyle and portraiture.

This can be a rough and tumble business and thick skin is a prerequisite, as is perseverance. Keeping the creative fires sparked up and motivation high can sometimes be an issue so when the creative urge strikes one has to run with it. In the last month alone I have shot BMX riders, kayaking and mountain biking for my stock agency and a couple of assignments. Keep your eyes peeled in the next few issues for the new work.

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Rob Haggart selects one of Michael's images for Slideshow

MICHAEL'S IMAGE CHOSEN FOR ROB HAGGART'S APHOTOEDITOR.COM SLIDESHOW



Michael made the cut on Rob Haggart's [A Photo Editor's Slideshow](#) of photographers he likes and would hire (and he has hired me). The image that made the cut (above) appears near the end of the show. Rob initially asked for submissions and culled them to help photo editors find talented photographers to work with. A

faster thumbnail version of the slideshow is available [here](#). Thanks for including me in the mix Rob!

RECENT CLIENTS: Adobe, Patagonia Expedition Race, Sierra, Trimble Survey, American Museum of Natural History and O'Reilly Digital Media.

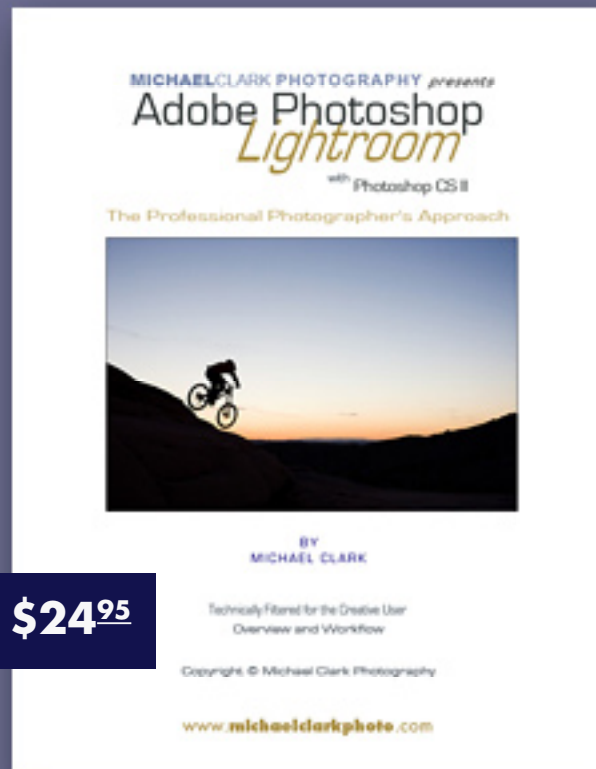
Cover of Sierra Magazine ON ASSIGNMENT IN NEW MEXICO



I recently shot an assignment for Sierra Magazine covering a native American Indian outdoors program and in the process also landed the cover image for the March/April Issue. The cover image was shot initially for stock several years ago. It was shot on Fuji Velvia film before the digital revolution with a Nikon N90s. The camera was clamped to the bike's seat post with a Slik Clamphead and I am the rider. This self-portrait was shot while riding on the Red Dot trail near White Rock, New Mexico just above the Rio Grande river. I used a slow shutter speed so I could blur everything but myself and the bike.

Sierra Magazine is the publication of the Sierra Club founded in 1892. Their mission is *"to explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth; to practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources; to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment..."* As such it is an honor and my privilege to work with Sierra Magazine.

ADOBE LIGHTROOM WORKFLOW A COMPLETE WORKFLOW FROM CAPTURE TO OUTPUT BY MICHAEL CLARK



NEED A CUTTING EDGE DIGITAL WORKFLOW? CURIOUS ABOUT ADOBE PHOTOSHOP LIGHTROOM AND HOW IT CAN SPEED UP YOUR DIGITAL WORKFLOW?

The Adobe Photoshop Lightroom Workflow, a 106 page PDF e-book, is a workshop in book form. This workflow, while not exhaustive will cover the main topics of a shooting workflow then move into a RAW processing workflow with Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop CS3.

To order *Adobe Photoshop Lightroom: A Professional Photographer's Workflow* click on the website link below. Payments can be made with any major credit card or via your PayPal account. For more information on the workflow and exactly what is covered go to Michael's website.

WWW.MICHAELCLARKPHOTO.COM

Nikon D300: Part II - A more detailed Review

A MORE DETAILED CRITIQUE AND REVIEW OF THE NIKON D300 AFTER PUTTING IT TO THE TEST



In the [last issue](#) of the newsletter, I laid out my first impressions of the Nikon D300. As promised in that review I would like to relay here a little more about this superb camera now that I have had four months to use and abuse it. As I wrote in the last newsletter I bought the D300 to act as a backup to my Nikon D2X for an assignment in Patagonia. All told, I spent a month in Patagonia covering the two-week Patagonia Expedition Race (see the article starting on page 8) and also backpacking in Torres del Paine National Park. It was raining for at least half of my time in Patagonia and snowing a few days as well at the higher elevations. And I found that the D300 quickly became my go to camera for a number of reasons including less noise at high ISOs, it's lighter body, faster framing rates (6 or 8 fps), and a more versatile autofocus setup.

On the topic of durability, any doubts I had about the D300's robust build were forgotten after it survived some extreme abuse in Patagonia. I thought that a camera with a pop-up flash would be a liability in rainy, wet conditions but the D300 proved me wrong. In many cases there just wasn't time to cover it up and get the shot - so I just kept shooting in sideways rain and the D300 never let me down. The camera also got smacked around a bit and came away with just a few scratches. Hence, I have full confidence in this baby's durability. It isn't a whole lot different than my D2X for robust build as far as I can tell. At the moment it does have a huge crack in the top LCD display but that was caused by my own fumbling when a chunk of metal (in the

form of a Kirk lens adapter plate) fell out of my camera pack and cracked the top LCD. The camera still works fine as does the top LCD, I'll just have to get it into Nikon Professional Services to have that replaced - not a big deal. Just normal wear and tear for a pro camera.

So the camera is tough - check. And it is fast - check. And it is well sealed from moisture, dust and rain - check. Let's get down to the nitty gritty here and talk about the new auto-focus system. At first I have to say that the new auto-focus set up in the D300 (and also the D3) is so complex that it is a bit tough to figure out how to set it. I initially set the camera up to use the Dynamic-Area AF autofocus as I had with my D2x - and I set it to use the 21 point option with the focus selector on the back of the camera set in the middle position (i.e. Dynamic AF). This would allow the camera to use the 21 points around the focus point I chose to help dial in the focus. Using this setup I quickly realized I was getting a lot of focus jump and sometimes even completely out of focus images with stationary objects. The focus was helped out a little too much one could say. With the D2x this mode worked perfectly but the D300 isn't a D2x. So I switched to single point autofocus on the D300 and this eliminated the problems -- at least for stationary objects.

With moving subjects I resorted to the Dynamic-Area AF mode with the custom settings (CSM a3) set to use 9 points around the point I chose. And while at first getting used to this setup seemed daunting I have figured out when to use the Dynamic Area AF and when to just

go with the single point AF. I have tried the 3D Tracking AF and 51 point Dynamic Area AF as well and they work very well in certain circumstances but for my work they are a bit unpredictable. The 3D tracking AF seems to need a good separation in color on the subject from the background for best results - but it can work incredibly well in the right conditions. I have found the 9 point Dynamic Area AF to work extremely well for most of my work so I haven't really explored 51 point Dynamic Area AF as much as I should.

Overall, I'd say the autofocus is better and more accurate than the AF in my older D2x. But, I would also say that it has a much larger and longer learning curve. And one has to switch modes more often depending on the situation which is fine - you just have to learn which AF works best for each shooting scenario.

I recently shot some whitewater kayaking on the Rio Grande and I have found this to be the toughest AF test of anything I normally photograph. The kayakers are moving in completely random directions and so fast that I can barely keep the camera on them much less worry about the autofocus. My tactics were to select a focus point that was based on composition and then try to follow the kayaker with that point pasted on or near their head. I used the 9 point Dynamic Area AF and it worked extremely well. I also had the MB-D10 grip attached to the D300 so I could shoot at 8 frames per second (fps). The extra battery power of the MB-D10 grip seemed to help the autofocus speed as would be expected and in general the camera performed perfectly when I used lenses with built-in Silent Wave Motor (i.e. AF-S lenses). With my non AF-S lenses, like my older Nikkor 300mm f/4 I noticed a larger percentage of soft images compared to those shot with my 70-200 mm f/2.8 AF-S lens. This is nothing new as I found the same result with my Nikon F5 back in the day and with my D2x to some degree. Hence, I can only recommend the AF-S lenses for sports photography. It's time to upgrade the older 300mm to an AF-S version.

One of the other interesting features of this new autofocus system that I didn't realize until after using it these past few months is that how I compose an image has now changed a lot - and for the better. Let me explain, with the D2x, when I was working with fast moving athletes I would have to plant one of the focus points on the athlete if I wanted a series of images to all be in focus. With the D2x it was nice (and better than what we had previously) because the points were

spread out across the viewfinder evenly. But this did on occasion force you into compositions that you may or may not have liked. Now, with the 51 points of the D300 which pretty much span the entire viewfinder I can compose the image first then select a focusing point that matches my composition. This may sound strange but in practice it really gives me a lot more freedom to craft the image. Notably, with the D3 the 51 points are grouped much closer to the center of the viewfinder than with the D300 and are not as useful in this respect.

The MB-D10 battery grip adds quite a bit of performance features to the D300, not the least of which is the vertical grip and a nice heft. The feel of the camera with the vertical grip attached isn't quite as nice as the D2x or the D3 with their integrated vertical grips but it is much more versatile since I can remove it if I need to go light and fast. The focus point selector on the grip works well but it is not nearly as nice as the selector on the camera. All in all though the D300 + MB-D10 grip is a great combo.

Another factor with the D300 is the buffer size. When you snap on the MB-D10 and start blasting away at 8 fps as I did on this last kayaking shoot you'll quickly hit the buffer (shooting RAW images) -- in just two seconds! That is approximately 17 shots but it is a surprise when the camera basically just stops firing. If you are shooting at 6 fps without the grip you can shoot 28 frames before the D300 will stop. Of course these numbers are highly dependant on what type of memory card you have in the camera. I'd advise buying the fastest cards you can find which right now are the SanDisk Extreme Ducati 4 GB cards. I would like to have a larger buffer on the D300 but I think we are at the limits of the hardware as it is. Even the D3 can only last two seconds (18 images) at full blast in 9 fps mode. Also, when you rip off 17 frames on the D300 clearing the buffer can be an issue - depending on your memory card it can take from 7 to 20 seconds for the buffer to clear which can seem like an eternity if the action continues. Hence, buy fast memory cards and have another camera body handy!

As I said in the last review, overall the D300 is a fantastic camera. I suppose the best way to quantify the D300 is to tell you that I sold my D2x last month since I never seemed to use it anymore. Now I just have to decide if I am going to add a D3 or another D300 to replace my D2x.

Tales from the Road:

COVERING THE PATAGONIA EXPEDITION RACE

Article and Images by Michael Clark



*L*ittle did I know that while sitting in a website optimization seminar last October I was preparing myself for one of the most adventurous assignments of my career. Our local New Mexico chapter of the American Society of Media Professionals had elected to bring Blake Discher to Santa Fe, New Mexico and give us a primer on how to optimize a website so it would show up on the first page of any Google or Yahoo search. At the time the technical details of this process weren't exactly exciting. But even so, I went home that evening and applied his advice to my website. I optimized my website for the search terms "Adventure Sports Photography". Not even two months later I got an email from the Patagonia Expedition Race based in Punta Arenas, Chile asking if I would be interested in covering "the biggest challenge in the history of adventure racing, the 6th edition of PATAGONIA EXPEDITION RACE®." The email went on to describe the event with the following: "Merely equipped with map, compass and minimal external assistance the participants will compete in four main disciplines Trekking, Mountain Biking, Climbing and Sea Kayaking. The race will cover more than 370 miles (600km) through the legendary Island of Tierra del Fuego, the awe-inspiring Darwin Range and the mystical Beagle Channel: perfect scenery for an adventure that has no equal." And all expenses are covered.

At first I thought, "This is too good to be true. It has to be spam." But in good spirit I responded to the email and asked for a little more information. When I got an email with the

details only a few hours later it took me all of three seconds to say, "Yes, count me in!" As a professional photographer it is extremely rare that a major and adventurous assignment like this one comes your way completely out of the blue. And since Patagonia had been on my list of travel destinations ever since I starting climbing big mountains this was an opportunity I couldn't pass up. The icing on the cake was we would be exploring one of the most remote places on earth – the Cordillera Darwin (a.k.a. the Darwin Range) which has only been set foot in by ten expeditions in recorded history. And one of those was by Darwin himself, hence the name of the range. Another kicker was this was unmapped and uncharted territory and the Wildlife Conservation Society was opening up an area, off-limits to the public, called the Karukinka Wildlife Preserve.

After 48 hours of flying including a few lost bags in Santiago, Lydia McDonald - a writer tagging along, and I arrived in Punta Arenas at the very southern tip of Chile. The organizers met us in the tiny airport and we were off to briefings and logistical meetings. It wasn't long before we felt like part of the Expedition Race family. Six photographers were flown in, a video crew and several writers as well. It was an international group of journalists from Tibet, Mexico, Australia, Chile, Argentina, Spain, Germany, Canada and the USA. As an adventure photographer it is extremely rare that I get to "hang out" with my peers and even more so when we are working together on the same project. Not to worry, later that evening with Pisco Sours (the traditional

David Garcia Galvan from team Canarias-Andalucia of Spain hiking and orienteering near the Darwin Glacier during the 2008 Patagonia Expedition Race.

celebratory drink with liquor, lemon juice and lots of sugar) in hand we were talking smack and enjoying ourselves “at the end of the world” as the locals say here in Punta Arenas.

Preserve. Many were hoping to make it through the first trekking section, which I was assured was brutal, and then continue into the Darwin Range. While discussing our options with Ann Meidinger, the race liaison for the media,



Since it was pretty much impossible to cover the entire race the photographers were split up to cover different sections. Lydia and I chose to cover the second half of the race starting just north of the Darwin Range. After all, I had come for the big mountains and I wasn't going to blink because of a few warnings that it would be extremely difficult trekking in unmapped territory. In the meeting to split up the photographers I was very surprised to see so many photographers opt for the first part of the race starting in Porvenir and then traversing through the Karukinka

she whispered to me “If you want to for sure go into the Darwin then you'll have to cover the second half of the race.” That was all I needed to hear. Our lot was cast. Now we just had to pack our bags for the 18-hour boat journey down the Magellan Straits to a little known or visited place called La Paciencia, which means “patience” in Spanish.

The boat ride was anything but comfortable. For 18 hours we tried to stay topside as much as possible – otherwise the 2-meter waves would induce nausea. We were on an

old US Coast Guard cutter called the Tucan. It was loaded to the gills with sea kayaks, our gear, food, gas, and the expedition racer's checkpoint gear. In the middle of the night we passed a remote salmon farm and spent a few hours

all enthralled by the adventures to come. Even the Tucan's captain said he had never been to this region of Patagonia.

The plan was that we would wait for the racers to reach the



there letting the captain sleep. Sleep was nearly impossible for the rest of us in the cramped quarters so I elected to shoot some long exposure images in the fishery – which was a floating island surrounded by nets. At about three in the morning a beam of red light seemed to cascade down onto the fish hatchery and I managed to capture a mysterious frame or two. Soon thereafter we left to finish our journey. As the sun rose we passed row upon row of unexplored snow-capped peaks in the Darwin Range. Glaciers came down to meet the water in remote bays and we were

halfway point at La Piedad where we would be waiting at an abandoned farmhouse. We were 40 kilometers north of the Darwin Range and once the racers reached us they would shift gears, re-supply and start the first sea kayaking section over to the foot of the Darwin Range. It took five days for the first team to get to us.

When the racers did show up it was an education in suffering. I have gone on several big mountain expeditions and have done my fair share of suffering but I don't think I have

ever seen people suffer like they did in this race. I'll admit that before the race my idea of adventure racing was rich, bored dentists out for a weekend of excitement but this race far surpassed any preconceived notion I ever had of

team captain, commented to me that the trekking section they had just come through was the most intense and difficult terrain he had ever seen in his life – in any adventure race. And that was supposed to be the easier trekking sec-



adventure racing. These athletes were pushing the envelope of the light and fast philosophy in unmapped terrain. They were Olympic athletes, Ironman winners and internationally ranked adventure teams that were far beyond “wicked” fit. When Teresa Dewitt of the French/American team walked into La Paciencia she was white as a ghost. The rest of the team didn’t look much better but she was especially fragile. As the team dug into their supplies at the checkpoint I could over hear them talking in French as to whether they could even continue the race. Bruno Rey, the

tion. Luckily for them, and the four other teams that arrived later that day, the ocean was in full rage and sea kayaking wasn’t an option. We waited for two full days for the oceans to calm but it never cooperated so we (the media and the teams) were ferried by a Chilean marine destroyer to the other side of the Magellan straits and to the foot of the Darwin Range where the race continued.

Minutes after landing at the Parry Este checkpoint, entrance the Darwin Range, we followed the racers into the Valley

of Death – and no I am not making this up. Before us was a 60-kilometer traverse through some of the most remote, rugged and inhospitable terrain on earth. The number of people who had actually done this traverse before us could

To be able to stay with the racers we had eliminated any and everything we could from our bloated backpacks. My camera gear alone – one Nikon D300, a flash and two lenses – seemed like a boat anchor compared to the stealth



be counted on one hand, and a few of those hardy mountaineers were among the race organizers. There were no trails, no maps and no guides. Four of us (Lydia, along with another writer from Santiago and his girlfriend, and myself) set out on our own following a Spanish team with a compass and a satellite print of the area – and our 50 pound expedition packs. I wasn't worried about getting lost since we were going into a deep gash of a valley with hanging glaciers above. In old school Vietnam vernacular, we had just been dropped "into the shit."

15-pound packs the racers were carrying. I had chosen the Nikon D300 because it was lighter than the D2x I carried as a backup. I wore a LowePro Toploader 75 AW on my chest with the D300 and a 70-200mm f/2.8 Nikkor attached to it. The other lens which I carried in a LowePro lens pouch was a 17-35mm f/2.8 Nikkor which hung off my pack but was easily accessible. The flash was stowed away in my pack and the "hatches" were battened down and ready for the deep river crossings that lay ahead of us. The thinking was the racers would be exhausted and even with our heavier

packs we would be able to keep up. But one team decided packs were too much to deal with, stuffed candy and nutrition bars into their Gore-tex jackets, carried one water bottle and took off. We didn't have a prayer of keeping up

never caught up to them. In fact, the winning team finished the traverse in just 28 hours! We were bogged down pretty fast as soon as we entered the Valley of Death. The ground was covered with this "turva" stuff which I have never seen



with our huge packs. Within a few hours the teams had left us in the dust. I shot close to a thousand images in that span, knowing that we might not see the racers again until the finish line. Our hope was to hike as fast as we could and catch up to the teams that evening and continue the traverse. We were told before starting that we had 60 hours total to finish the traverse – the boat would be leaving after that. Twenty-four of those 60 hours would be dark and rainy – nighttime. We had our work cut out for us. As it turned out, most of the teams never stopped so we

anywhere else on planet earth. It is like a living sponge that is filled with water and you can fall into it quite deeply, sometimes just up to your ankles or up to your waist. That made for slow going. And we had to be cautious because we had no satellite phone – nothing. If someone got injured we were going to have to rescue ourselves. No one would know where we were – heck, we didn't even know exactly where we were. And we were in an alpine jungle with trees so dense that not even a helicopter could find us in this valley.

The varied and intense terrain made for exceptional images though. We crossed beaver ponds that were only a hundred yards long but took an hour to traverse. And I managed to fall into something like quicksand. It wasn't quicksand – it seemed much worse. We were crossing a meadow filled with turva and tall grass when I decided that going straight across would save us some time. Not thirty feet into the meadow I stepped onto what looked like a patch of dirt. I went in up to my waist and it locked onto me like concrete. It was the consistency and color of pumpkin pie (with the strings) and I was now mired in some sort of bog that was seemingly bottomless. Luckily, my back foot caught underneath me on the edge of the “pool”. Otherwise I would have gone in up to my chest and that would have taken a long time to extricate myself from. As it was, Lydia tried to pull me out which didn't work. She nearly separated my ankle and shoulder trying that method. I crossed my trekking poles and tried to lever myself out as if I was in deep powder and that didn't work. After five minutes, I just started digging furiously trying not to sink in any deeper. My three companions must have been in shock. They just stood there motionless and helpless. And no one took any photos – which I regret now. I should have asked them to but I was more concerned with getting myself out. After several minutes of digging I managed to pull my leg out of the deep hole. I was covered in “pumpkin pie” from my waist down. I looked pretty comical. And I remember stating, “Ok, we are not walking straight across any more meadows!” Ten minutes later we crossed a waist deep river filled with glacial run off that was flying downhill at incredible speed. By the time I got to the other side I was clean as a whistle and very wet.

The challenge when covering a race like this or doing photography in the backcountry is to keep the camera handy. I remember a quote from Kent Kobersteen, famed National Geographic photo editor that summed up the shooting conditions quite well. He said, “ The really strong photos

come from those situations where the last thing you want to do is take pictures – when everything is going to hell, when the storms are raging and everyone is trying to hang on.” I kept repeating that quote in my mind to help me pull the camera out and keep shooting as we trekked into the Valley of Death. We were wet from head to toe. The ground was wet and the dense forest forced us to bushwhack our way through. Around the beaver ponds we would wade through waist deep brackish water and then navigate over and under downed trees. Everywhere the ground was wet and slippery. One misstep in the wrong place and you would find yourself skewered on the spear-like end of a beaver-chewed stump.

My first order of business was always to make sure the camera gear staid dry. Keeping the camera dry and handy was a paradox. I had plenty of trash bags and a few dry bags to help out but to keep the camera gear dry I always relied on the LowePro's built in all-weather rain cover. It would get soaked through fairly quickly but the padded chest pouch kept the water out fairly well. The bigger problem was shooting in the rain. I had an extra gore-tex jacket that was meant to cover my camera while shooting but there wasn't always time to get that set up. So my Nikon D300 got a pretty severe testing in rain, sleet and snow. And well, it did just fine thankfully. Most of the time I'd end up putting the camera back into the chest pouch wet – there wasn't really a choice. The camera and lenses got bumped around pretty harshly and luckily I never fell in completely on some of our hair ball river crossings. The most dangerous time for the equipment were lens changes. When it was raining sideways , which was fairly often, I'd have to use my body to block the rain and be careful not to drip water running off my rain jacket into the lens or the camera body.

Three quarters of the way up the Valley we set up camp and it started to rain. And it didn't stop for two days. When we woke up the next morning there were cascades of wa-

ter falling everywhere from the cliffs above us. It was beautiful but a little alarming. The rivers we had crossed on our way up were already dicey. And that river drained the entire valley. We had a decision to make. We were now about one

much larger. In fact they were deadly. The water levels were at least two or three meters higher than when we crossed them the day before. We searched for quite a while before we could find any place to cross and even then it was ex-



third of the way through the traverse of the Darwin Range. We had climbed through most of the worst part of the traverse but we only had 30 hours to do the rest of it before we missed our boat on the other side. And on top of that pretty much everything we owned was wet save for our sleeping bags, one set of long underwear and my camera gear. Tents can only slow down the rain in Patagonia – one way or another everything gets wet. So forgoing our desire to finish the traverse we turned tail and headed back to the Parry Este checkpoint. The rivers were as we imagined

citing. The water was moving fast, so fast it was taking me off my feet every few seconds. Later that day, exhausted, we had to cross an even bigger river and we went as a team of four.

I was still concentrating on photography as much as I could while we hiked out. While resting and contemplating yet another beaver pond traverse I captured one of my cohorts, Fernanda Rojas sitting on a log, utterly exhausted from a long day of moving and with a swollen eye from

the carnivorous mosquito's that camped with us the night before (See image on page 12). She was soaked and her red jacket set against a sea of green vegetation helped create one of the best portraits from the entire trip. By the time we made it back down to the riverside talus the clouds had parted just enough for us to see the entire Darwin Range in its full glory. We were close to the checkpoint but still battling dense forests and deep rivers.

Back at Parry Este, I was told a helicopter was on its way to shuttle me to the next checkpoint where I could continue covering the race. But the weather reigns supreme in Patagonia. The clouds rolled in and killed any chance of a helicopter taking us anywhere. Later that day, one of the teams rolled into camp a few hours after we did. They had had enough and called it quits. Everything they owned was wet. It rained for another day and a half. We hiked to a nearby glacier and spent a lot of time in our tents, waiting for the boat that would take us back to Punta Arenas. While we waited news reports came in over the satellite phone that the French-American team had won but Bruno, the captain, had very nearly died in a river crossing on the same day that we hiked out.

Looking back, it was indeed a serious adventure I'll never forget. We had truly gone to places that are off the map. I also feel very fortunate that I was the only photographer to cover this section of the race. I'm not one who loves being in a pack of photographers – I always seek out the location where everyone isn't. And it seems I found it in Patagonia as well. One of the hardest aspects of shooting a race like this, for me at least, was that I could control nothing. Normally, I have complete control over a photo shoot. Whether it is climbing, mountain biking or kayaking I can normally ask the athletes to "do it again" or to come back later in the day for the good light. During the race, you were either in position or you weren't. On the one hand it makes those images you did hustle for that much more

exciting but in the end an editor judges the merit of an image dispassionately without knowing how hard it was to be there or get into position. As I am always up for a challenge this became one of the most interesting demands of covering the race.

Once back in Punta Arenas I heard horror stories from the other photographers. One guide was injured and had to be evacuated by helicopter. The video crew was grossly under prepared for the wilderness experience and was evacuated. It sounded like they had a true epic. My experience in comparison was fairly exciting but not quite as haggard.

All told, I ended up spending only three days with the racers actually covering the race though I shot thousands of photos of the surrounding landscape, my companions and the entire experience. The weather controls everything in Patagonia. Was I disappointed that I didn't get to cover more of the race – sure. But I have enough experience in the adventure world to know that as a photographer we are never fully in control. That fact alone helps us create images we never could have imagined. I'd go back tomorrow if I could! And well, I have been told I am already slated to go back in 2009 to cover the race again! This time we'll be going fast and light and suffering like dogs but we'll be in the thick of it until we drop from sheer exhaustion.

Image Captions:

Page 10: Cyril Margaritis of team Authentic-Nutrition (France/USA) cooking a can of beans at La Paciencia.

Page 11: Race participants going through required testing of their sea kayaking skills just prior to the 2008 Patagonia Expedition Race.

Page 12: Fernanda Rojas taking a rest while hiking trail-less terrain through a beaver pond in the Valley of Death in the Darwin Range.

Page 13: Bruno Rey of team Authentic-Nutrition (France/USA) showing his wrinkled and sore foot at La Paciencia.

Page 14: Team Canarias-Andalucia (Spain) hiking along the beach in the Darwin Range.

Page 16: Team Littleton Bike and Fitness (USA) trekking into La Paciencia Checkpoint.

[PORTFOLIO]



[PORTFOLIO]



Finding Inspiration *by Michael Clark*

How do you find inspiration? Sometimes finding inspiration can be difficult. As with any artist, constantly trying to come up with creative images is the heart of what we do. I was recently talking with a good buddy, fellow pro photographer Marc Romanelli about the creative process and how he finds inspiration. He quoted one of his mentors, Jay Maisel, who said, “There are two basic ways to find inspiration. One is to go on a trip and the other is to put the camera down for a while.” This advice wasn’t news to either Marc or myself. It was just nice to hear the same advice applies to all of us whether you’ve been shooting for six decades like Jay Maisel or you are just starting out.

As our conversation continued we thought of a few other ways to

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ON A TRIP AND THE OTHER IS TO PUT THE CAMERA DOWN FOR A WHILE.”

get the creative juices flowing. One method that has worked for me is to push myself by using new and different gear (like shooting with a medium format camera or using strobes) which might challenge me creatively and technically. In other words, it makes me think - and thinking is always good. Another technique I use when I start to feel a lack of creativity is to shoot a new sport or work in a genre of photography that is really difficult or new for me. Over the last few years I have really been working on portraiture because I find it to be the most difficult genre of photography. In the process, I have found that so much has to come together in terms of lighting, composition and a connection with the person you are photographing that by comparison a rock climbing shoot is much easier - but involves a lot more sweat.

And as Jay said, putting down the camera for a while is probably the best way to get the creative juices flowing. Shooting non-stop day after day with no breaks is pretty much the biggest impediment to creativity, especially if one is shooting a lot of assignments and isn’t very excited about those projects. Time off for me is the key to staying inspired and creating inspired images.

Going on an exciting trip, especially to a new location is also an incredible boost for inspiration. My recent trip to Patagonia is a perfect example. I have always wanted to explore Patagonia and it had been a while since I have been on an extended “expedition”. Spending a month at the end of the world in extremely remote locations did a lot to renew the creative spark. I was reminded of why I became a professional photographer in the first place and why I love shooting adventure sports.

However you find inspiration it is important to figure out the how and why so that you can re-create that process on an on-going basis. It all comes down to passion - if you are passionate about your work then your photos will likely reflect that.



Joe Poisson launching off the edge of a drainage pipe in northern Albuquerque, New Mexico.
Nikon D300, Nikkor 17-35mm f/2.8D, Dyna-Lite Uni400jr Strobe, Sandisk Extreme III CF Card