

NEWSLETTER

MICHAEL CLARK

PHOTOGRAPHY



SPRING 2012



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Cover Image: A shot of the Sheik Zayed Road, and surrounding skyscrapers, as seen from the Level 43 lounge on top of the Four Points by Sheraton Hotel in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Opposite Page: An abstract reflection of a couple walking under the brilliant white arches of the Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Both images were shot with the Nikon D800.





The Never Ending Treadmill

A re-cap of 2012 so far, and the reason the Newsletter has been on hiatus

The last two years of my career have been non-stop. They have been the busiest of my entire career. I keep waiting for things to slow down, but instead, the work just keeps piling up. But I can't complain. In this economy I feel blessed to be so busy and to have clients calling me with interesting assignments. As you might have noticed, this issue of the Newsletter is the first one I have produced this year. I was too busy finishing up my latest book, as described on page 6, to work up the Winter 2012 edition of the Newsletter. Hence, this one is a bit larger than normal since there is a lot to catch up on. Aside from the book, I have also had several big assignments that have kept me busy over the last eight months. I have also taught a few workshops this year already. One was with the Mentor Series in Dubai and the other was a Surfing Photography Workshop in Hawaii. If all of that wasn't enough, I bought a new house this spring and have moved both my office and studio into the new location. With so much going on, it was difficult to finish the book. But it is finished and it is finally out and on sale. There are a ton of links to vendors that are selling the new book in this Newsletter and on my website.

This Newsletter contains an article about an assignment with Lifstil last September, a review of the latest Nikon DSLRs and an excerpt from the new book. Since last fall there has also been a stream of amazing press about my

work (see the news section for a few of those items). And as usual there is a Perspective piece at the end of the Newsletter that dives into the torturous process of writing this latest book.

For me, the book writing process continues as right now I am revising my digital workflow e-book, *Adobe Photoshop Lightroom: A Professional Photographer's Workflow*. I am hoping to have that new version of the e-book finished later this month. It is slow going right now with everything else I have in the works but rest assured I am working on it. I have heard from many of you who are wondering when the new e-book is coming out so I thought I would mention it here. As usual, the e-book will be updated and improved to make it a worthwhile upgrade.

Opposite Page: The view of the skyscrapers surrounding the Dubai Marina from our hotel's infinity pool in Dubai. We were staying at the Address Marina Hotel and all around us skyscrapers were being built at a furious pace. Throughout this Newsletter, there are numerous images from my recent workshop in Dubai.

Recent Clients: Nikon, National Geographic, Schiesser AG (Germany), Red Bull, Deltaway Energy, PeachPit Publishing, Digital Photo Pro, Backpacker, Climbing, and Nikon World Magazine.



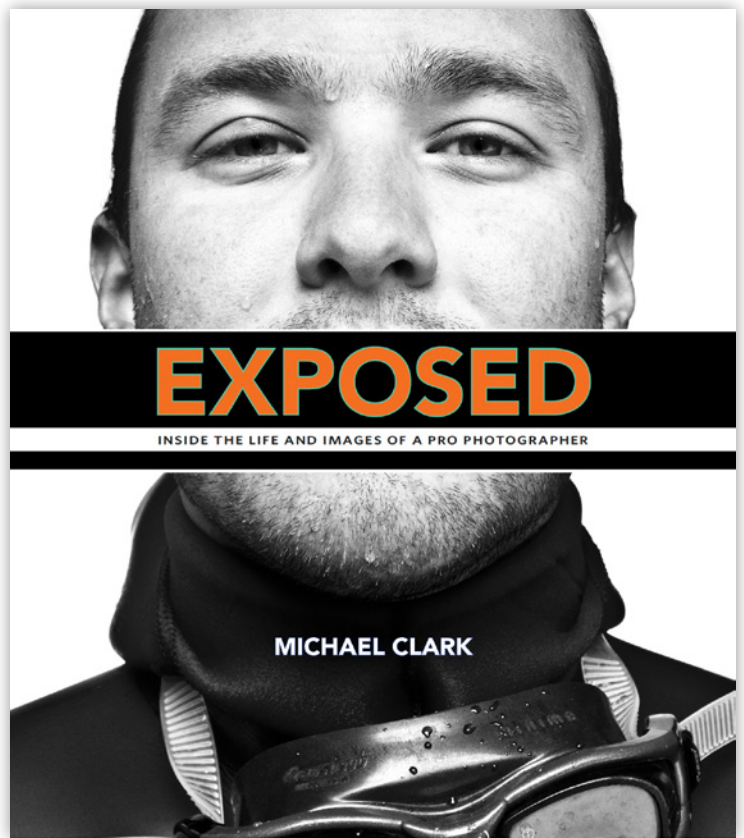
Exposed: Inside the Life & Images of a Pro Photographer

My latest book is finally out and available at a bookstore near you

Over the course of the last nine months or so, between assignments and all of my other work I have been working on a new book, my third with PeachPit Press for the New Riders “Voices that Matter” Collection. The new book is titled “Exposed: The Life and Images of a Pro Photographer.” The idea behind this book is to strip some of the glamour off this profession and share a wide range of stories and experiences to give the reader a very clear view of what it is like in this day and age to be a working professional photographer.

This book is a hybrid in that there are essays about my life as a pro photographer, entire chapters that talk about specific adventurous assignments and also four chapters where I disseminate sixteen images in detail. In those chapters, I share the stories behind the images, tell how they were created and also how they were worked up so that the reader can see the entire process—and what it took to get the shot. Along the way I make sure not to leave out the embarrassing parts or any of the gory details so you the reader can learn from my experiences.

The book also includes a DVD with a primer on Lightroom and Photoshop and videos where you can watch me work up those sixteen images—and see exactly what



I do and how I work (at least in the post-processing). I view this book as an advanced version of both of my previous books because it takes the theoretical and puts it into practice. If you would like to learn more about the book, you can visit my [website](#). You can also order the book on [Amazon](#), [Barnes and Nobles](#) and also on [PeachPit's website](#). Until June 1st, 2012, PeachPit is offering a 35% discount on the book. Visit my [blog](#) for details.



Figure 2.3 The image before (left) and after (right) it was processed in Lightroom. The Before and After preview mode in the Develop module is accessible by clicking the Before and After icon in the toolbar just under the image preview.

Exposure slider. In Lightroom Version 4, the overall brightness of the image—that is, the exposure—is set with the Exposure slider, which is why it is at the top of the Tone sliders. Here I set the overall brightness of the image using the Exposure slider; in this case I brightened the image slightly by moving it to +0.35.

Note that when you click on any of the Tone sliders (except for the Contrast slider), a corresponding area in the Histogram above is ever so slightly highlighted, indicating which part of the Histogram you are affecting. For instance, when I click on the Exposure slider, the middle of the Histogram is highlighted; when I click on the Blacks slider, the far-left part of the Histogram is highlighted; and when I click on the Whites slider, the far-right side of the Histogram is highlighted. This helps to understand exactly how you are affecting the different tones in the image and correspondingly how the Histogram is affected.

Whites slider. Next, I adjusted the image highlights with the Whites slider. By clicking on the Whites slider and holding down the Option (Alt) key, Lightroom displays a very clear preview of any parts of the image where the highlight detail was rendered as

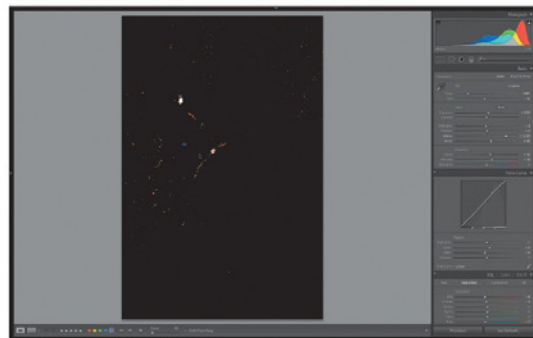


Figure 2.4 This view mode appears when you click the Whites slider while holding down the Option (Alt) key. This image has very few blown-out, or clipped, highlight areas. In fact, there were none (as it was processed). To get clipped areas to appear in this screen shot, I had to pull the Whites slider to the far right. When I did so, Lightroom displayed the colors that were blown out (red and a little patch of blue in this instance) or pure white if all the color channels were blown out.

pure white, or blown out. Blown-out highlight detail, also known as clipped highlights, are caused by the image being overexposed, or they could also be caused because parts of the scene are beyond the exposure latitude of the camera. In either case, by pressing the Option (Alt) key and using the Whites slider in Lightroom, I can very accurately recover detail in those blown-out, or clipped, highlights. However, in this image there isn't much highlight information to recover (Figure 2.4); hence, I moved the Whites slider only slightly (set to -3) to move the white point of the Histogram away from the right edge.

Blacks slider. In a similar manner I can accurately adjust the darkest tones in the image by clicking on the Blacks slider and holding down the Option (Alt) key. By doing so, Lightroom shows those areas of the image where shadow detail has been completely lost and is rendered as pure black, or is clipped (Figure 2.5). I normally adjust the Blacks slider using this technique and also by looking at the Histogram at the top of the right panel. When adjusting the Whites and Blacks sliders, you are essentially adjusting the end points of the Histogram (see the sidebar "The Histogram in Detail"). Hence,

THE STORY

This image in particular might well be the best rock climbing image I've ever shot. I don't say that lightly because I started out as a rock climbing photographer and have shot tens of thousands of climbing images over the years. In fact, I've shot thousands of images of Timy over the last ten years, and many of those are also among my best images. It is often said that photographers get attached to their images, and I am certainly attached to this one—mostly because it took some serious effort to create and a bit of luck. Timy and I had talked about this image for a few years before we actually went out and created it. Both of us had been to the location multiple times, and from our discussions we knew it would be a lot of work to haul all of the lighting gear up into the cave to get the image we wanted. This image is the exact image I had in mind before we ever got to the location for this shoot.

The Crystal Cave, located high in the Jemez Mountains near Jemez Springs, New Mexico, is not much to look at. It is a rather small cave, about the size of a small two-bedroom house. The rock is limestone, which has a lot of small pockets and is perfect for the super steep style of climbing in this cave. Because it is at a high altitude, about 8,000 feet, the best time of year to climb in the Crystal Cave is during the summer. As it happened, on the day we scheduled this shoot in mid-July, it was 98 degrees Fahrenheit. That temperature is certainly not ideal for climbing or labor-intensive photography. Being the professional that he is, Timy showed up and went to work without fail. The route is extremely difficult, and even though Timy has climbed much harder routes than this one, the temperatures made upward progress incredibly challenging. As I've come to expect from Timy, he was able to climb the route with style and ease—and a lot of chalk to dry his hands.

The plan was to haul up a few battery-powered strobes into the cave and balance the artificial light inside the cave with the post-sunset ambient glow, timing it all so that we

could capture Timy in the midst of the action. We would have about 15–20 minutes just after sunset when the fading light would be ideal. In theory it sounds simple, but in reality just getting the gear up into the cave was back-breaking work. I arrived with over 200 pounds of camera equipment and started hiking multiple 60-pound loads of gear up and into the cave—in 98-degree heat. By the time I had hauled the first load into the cave, which sits only a few hundred feet above the road, I was drenched in sweat. I had arrived two hours early, at about 2 p.m., so that I could be set up before Timy and the other climbers arrived. After four trips and more than an hour of hard labor, I had everything in the cave and took a 15-minute break just to cool down.

To light the cave, I used two Dynalite Uni400JR battery-powered strobes (this image was shot before I made the switch to Elinchrom strobes, which in my view are vastly superior to these Dynalites). These strobes ran off fairly small battery packs and gave me 140 full-power flashes. As always with lighting, I first found my shooting position, which was dictated by the route that ran directly out the center of the cave. Once I had my position dialed in, I set up the two strobes to the left of my shooting position (Figure 8.12). The strobe closest to me was fitted with a 7-inch reflector and a 20-degree Grid Spot that narrowed the beam of light to right where Timy would be at the lip of the cave. The second strobe was set up about 15 feet away, again on camera left. It was fitted with a 7-inch reflector and aimed at the far left side of the cave to add some overall illumination to a very dark corner of the cave. Both strobes had a very slight 1/8 CTO (Color Temperature Orange) warming gel taped to the front of the reflectors. Because the cave was fairly dark even in late afternoon, it was easy enough to establish the right exposure for the strobes with the help of the camera's LCD and Histogram.

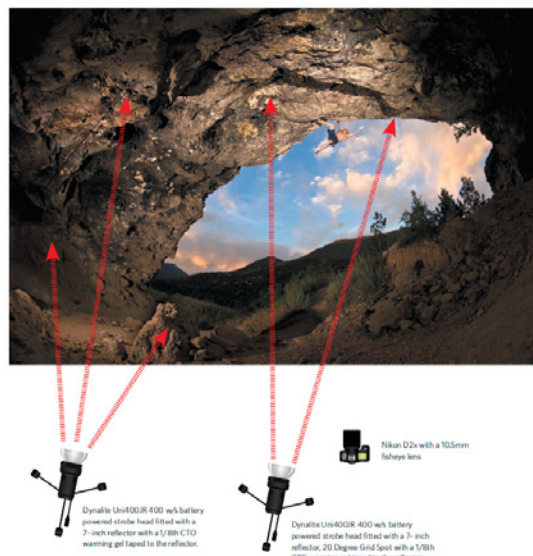


Figure 8.12 A diagram of how the battery-powered strobes were set up to create this image. Note that only one of the strobes had a Grid Spot on it, which narrowed the beam of light to illuminate Timy Fairfield and also helped to create a dramatic lighting effect.

American Photo Magazine 2011 Images of the Year

One of Michael's images made the cut for the American Photo 2011 IOTY Portfolio



The December 2011 issue of American Photo magazine featured my image of B.A.S.E. jumper Jon DeVore (above), which was chosen as one of the best images of 2011. It garnered the runner up position for Commercial images in the 2011 Images of the Year section of the magazine. It was one of only 11 images chosen for the 2011 Images of the Year portfolio. I am honored that they chose one of my images. My thanks to Red Bull, Jon DeVore, American Photo magazine and the judges for this years Images of the Year portfolio including: Lesley A. Martin, Landon Nordeman, Rick Rickman, Penny de los Santos, Joyce Tenneson and Michael Sand. The

caption read: "This photo catches a moment at the top of his jump where Jon is hanging in the air," says photographer Michael Clark of this shot of Jon DeVore's BASE jump (for "building, antennae, span and earth") from a cliff in southwestern Utah. "He is committed and really going for it." You could say the same of Clark. Shooting the Red Bull Air Force jump team was an exercise in limited opportunities. "There were three jumpers, and they only jumped three times apiece," Clark recalls. "One second after each jump, each one was just a dot in the sky. I had a remote camera set up so that each time, I got about 18 frames total from two different angles."

Master of Adventure article in Digital Photo Pro

Michael included in the Digital Photo Pro 2011 Masters Issue

It was truly a great honor to be included in the December 2011 “Masters” issue of Digital Photo Pro. After 15 years of hard work, this article, entitled “Master of Adventure” is one of the jewels of my career so far. Not only is it fulfilling to see this come to fruition but there is also a very good story behind the article. Sixteen years ago in the spring of 1995, when the idea of becoming a professional photographer was just a pipe dream, one of my first submissions was to Christopher Robinson at Outdoor Photographer. I had shot some landscape images in Palo Duro Canyon State Park (near Amarillo, Texas) and wrote a one page article for one of their columns to go along with the images and my submission. At that time, I was still testing the waters to see if I could even get anything published. In total, I sent out three submissions: two to climbing magazines and this one to Outdoor Photographer. Amazingly all three submissions were published and that was the start of my career as an adventure photographer.

A few years ago while I was in Los Angeles, I met up with Christopher, now the Editor of Digital Photo Pro, and we reminisced about his selection of my work back in 1995. During that portfolio review, we got to chatting about possible articles for Digital Photo Pro. In that initial meeting Christopher said he wanted to have a feature article on me and my work in Digital Photo Pro.



Spring ahead to last fall, after shooting a big assignment for Lifstil (see page 20) out in the Los Angeles area, I met up with Christopher again and he asked me how things were going. When I told him I was having a stellar year, one of the best of my entire career, he said, “Ok, that’s it. I would like to feature you in the Master’s issue at the end of the year. How does that sound?” I just about fell out of my chair. But before I was too overwhelmed I managed to say “Yes, that sounds fantastic” or something to that effect. Christopher has literally seen my entire career from the very beginning. So in light of that history, it is a very special honor to be among the mix of legendary photographers in the December 2011 Masters issue of Digital Photo Pro. My thanks to Christopher Robinson for including me in the 2011 Masters issue and for the great article and layout. Also, my thanks to William Sawalich, who wrote the article, and did a great job. You can read the article on the Digital Photo Pro website.

workshops

2012 Photography Workshops

An overview of workshops coming up with Michael Clark

Each year I teach several workshops on a variety of topics including adventure photography, digital workflow and artificial lighting. Below is a listing of the workshops I will be teaching this summer and fall in 2012. For the full descriptions about each of these workshops and to find out how to register for these workshops go to the [Workshops page on my website](#). I hope to see you out there in the field this year.

Mentor Series Photo Trek

Chicago, U.S.A. — August 10-12, 2012

Join the Mentor Series as we venture to Chicago, a thriving metropolis perched on the shores of magnificent Lake Michigan and the powerful Chicago River. Summer is a fantastic time to capture the astonishing architecture, park landscapes and cultural melting pot of the Windy City from every angle—whether you are pointing your lens up from a riverboat or shooting a bird’s-eye view from atop a jutting skyscraper, this urban playground for photographers will not disappoint. Trek alongside Nikon professional photographers Reed Hoffmann and Michael Clark to pick up the ultimate tips and techniques that will help you create timeless photos that best represent this Midwestern city’s diverse offerings.

Frame up amazing environmental portraits of local blues

musicians, using your mentors’ helpful advice and the urban streets as the perfect backdrop. Board a private double-decker bus and consider the direction of the light as the mentors help you find a new way to see the famous landmarks. Pass the Sears Tower and the Art Institute, as well as the many public art installations such as The Four Seasons mural by Marc Chagall and a Picasso masterpiece.

At Millennium Park photographic opportunities abound with several unique sights, including the reflective Cloud Gate sculpture (affectionately dubbed “The Bean” by residents), the engaging Crown Fountain or the serpentine BP Pedestrian Bridge, to name just a few. Don’t miss Buckingham Fountain in Grant Park as it lights up to photographic splendor, accompanied with music and beautifully animated with choreography of colored spotlights. Enjoy private access and early morning light from the 94th floor of the John Hancock Center Observatory Deck. Take ample time to frame your shot as the sun crests the skyline over the sprawling city below. Experiencing one of America’s greatest cities through your viewfinder is guaranteed to expand your knowledge and renew your excitement for photography. This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to learn from the pros will be the best inspired decision you make. Sign up today! For more information visit the [Mentor Series Photo Treks](#) website.

Adventure Sports Photography Workshop

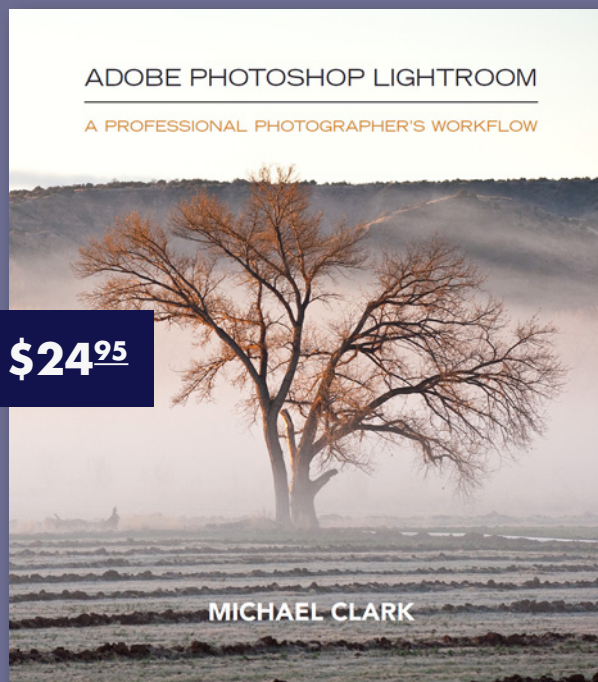
Maine Media Workshops — August 19-25, 2012

Adventure sports photography can be an adventure in itself, involving breathtaking locations, extreme conditions and working with elite athletes in risky situations. It requires a host of skills, including technical excellence with the camera, familiarity with the sport and the ability to keep your goals and safety in mind throughout.

Designed for intermediate to experienced photographers, this workshop concentrates on creating unique adventure sports and lifestyle images. We focus on outdoor sports like: sea kayaking, mountain biking and rock climbing. Using athletes as our models and Maine's coastal landscape as our backdrop, we explore innovative ways to capture the essence of each sport. Topics covered during the week include research and preparation, composition and camera angles, equipment selection and use, using natural light, fill flash and battery-powered strobes, and autofocus techniques.

We will also learn how to work with athletes who are putting themselves at risk and how to capture the intensity of the action. Each day finds us out in new locations and in the classroom editing and critiquing images, and meeting one-on-one with Michael. In addition, Michael shares his insights and experiences in the adventure marketplace, including career development, portfolios and how to shoot for stock, editorial, and commercial clients. For more information visit the Maine Media Workshops [website](http://www.maine-media.com) or call (877) 577-7700.

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



The Adobe Photoshop Lightroom Workflow, a 353 page e-book, is a workshop in book form. Updated for Adobe Lightroom 3 and Photoshop CS5, this e-book was completely re-written and presents a workflow that can be adapted by any photographer, professional or amateur. I can honestly say that I have not seen any other book on the market today that includes as much detailed and comprehensive information as this e-book does on digital workflow.

To purchase *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

The Nikon D4 and D800

An non-technical review of Nikon's latest professional cameras

Normally, I don't buy the latest cameras as soon as they are announced but the specs for the Nikon D4 and D800 were so good that they were hard to resist. Aside from the specs, I was starting to feel like my older Nikon D700 and D300 were seriously lacking in the megapixel category. Several of my clients were asking for larger image files and well, the new Nikons fit the bill. I wasn't sure if I really needed the 36 MP resolution provided by the D800 but now that I have it, I can't imagine shooting anything else. Last November, I put my name on the waiting list for the new Nikons (with Samy's Camera in Los Angeles) before they were even announced. I received both cameras in the very first batch of cameras delivered to Samy's Camera, which in turn, were some of the first cameras to come into the U.S.A. Usually, I review cameras independently but since these two cameras came out only a few weeks apart, and share many of the same features, I will review them both in this issue of the newsletter. First off, let's discuss the D4, and then we'll move onto the D800.

The Nikon D4

Nikon's New Workhorse

While shooting big-wave surfing in Tahiti last year, and in Hawaii earlier this year, I remember longing for more megapixels and a faster framing rate. In short, I

was longing for a D4-like camera. And well, Nikon did not disappoint. Without a doubt the Nikon D4 is a stellar camera. It is also a speed demon. Blasting away at 11 fps gives me confidence that I won't miss anything when it comes to the action.

While it is nice to have four more megapixels than my old Nikon D700, at 16 MP the resolution of the D4 isn't going to blow anyone away. I was hoping the D4 would be a 24 MP camera with a framing rate of 8 or 9 fps and the same low noise of my D700. Instead Nikon chose to keep the noise on par with the D3s, increase the framing rate slightly and only marginally increase the resolution. I will have to wait for the Nikon D5 for a 24 MP camera that fires at 10+ fps. The technology just isn't there yet for what I wanted. Nonetheless, the D4 will meet my needs for the next few years and beyond I am sure. The reality is that 12 MP was more than many of my clients really needed, but more megapixels gives me more options on the back end—especially when it comes to cropping images. 16 MP is a great file size for the adventure sports images that I shoot.

While the specs are impressive, let's talk about the camera body itself for a moment. As usual with pro camera bodies, the Nikon D4 is a tank. It has superb weather sealing, a solid metal body and it fits my hand like a glove.

I really do prefer the feel of a solid pro camera body. The ergonomics of the D4 have been improved significantly, in my view, over the D3s. There have been some who have complained about the new button placements, and I will admit I am still getting used to the new focus point joysticks, but overall I find the camera a joy to use. The ergonomics, I think I can safely say, are better than any other pro Nikon Body I have ever used.

The D4 has two memory card slots. One is for the standard CompactFlash cards, and the other is for the new XQD memory cards. As the only camera on the market with the new card format, it is hard to tell whether or not the XQD format will catch on. I had to update a bunch of

my memory cards because of the higher resolution sensors in the D4 and D800—and because my older cards had seen some serious abuse. I purchased an extra 32 GB Sony XQD card [to go along with the 16 GB XQD card that came with the D4] as well as a bunch of 32 GB SanDisk Extreme Pro memory cards. Since I shoot action sports and actually need the ability to shoot 40 to 50 frame bursts (or more) at 11 fps the idea of having memory cards that can shoot bursts of up to 90+ frames in

one go is very appealing. In fact this capability of the D4 was one of the main selling points for my work—especially for surfing, where the surfer is sometimes on the wave for six to seven seconds. With older cameras you were assured of hitting the buffer and the camera locking up. With the D4 that is no longer an issue, even when shooting raw images.



The Nikon D4 with a Nikkor AF-S 85mm F/1.4 G lens attached.

Time will tell if the XQD format is the future. I hope it is. The cards themselves seem very robust and are easy to use. And I was very impressed that Nikon included a 16 GB Sony XQD card and an XQD card reader along with the Nikon D4 to help everyone get used to the new card format. The only downside I have found to the

XQD format is the card reader. The XQD card reader, unfortunately, has a USB 3.0 connection. Because Apple laptops are not USB 3.0 compliant (at the moment), it takes forever to download a 16 GB XQD card. On my Mac Pro tower, the card reader seems to work fairly well, but on the laptop it took about an hour to download 8 GB of images off an XQD memory card with the XQD card reader. Hopefully someone comes out with a Firewire 800 or Thunderbolt XQD card reader as that would make

the format much more appealing for MacBook Pro users. Because the card reader is made by Sony, not Nikon, I cannot fault the camera for this glaring frustration.

Now let's get down to brass tacks here and talk about image quality. For stills, as you would expect the image quality is excellent. The 16 MP still images have phenomenal color fidelity and the dynamic range seems much improved as well over and above my Nikon D700. Focusing is wicked fast and dead on in my experience. The lack of noise in images shot at high ISOs is astounding—on par with the Nikon D3s. I can't say that the D4 has less noise in images shot at high ISOs than the D3s had—it seems about the same. There is certainly a lot less noise at the higher ISOs than was the case with my D700. I am pretty sure that the Nikon D4 will still be the low-light king of all the DSLRs on the market. As far as I can tell there are no other cameras out there producing such low noise images files at high ISOs. Overall, the image quality on the D4 is stellar at all ISOs up to ISO 6400, and even test images I have shot at ISO 12,800 are phenomenal. I won't hesitate for even a second to crank the ISO up to 6400 or even 12,800 if needed.

The new lower-capacity, lithium-ion batteries for the D4 have also been controversial. Because of the new laws in Japan, Nikon, and Canon for that matter, were forced to change their batteries. So far, I have not run out of battery power on any photo shoot so I am not that concerned about the new batteries—they seem fine. The battery charger supplied with the camera works extremely well too. It is a two bay charger, meaning you can charge two batteries at once, which is nice but the charger itself is huge and a royal pain to pack. I wish Nikon offered a single battery charger unit for travelling but they don't. I will

just have to figure out how to pack the giant two bay charger more efficiently. For heavy shooting days, like when shooting surfing, the 2-bay unit will come in handy but for everything else I could do without it.

In terms of video quality, in my limited testing, the 1080p HD video quality is phenomenal. I have heard reports online where people think the HD video quality is a bit soft, but my camera produces wicked sharp 1080p video. The new head phone jack and also the manual audio input controls are a very nice touch. The video quality from what I can tell is only matched by the video quality of the Nikon D800. It far surpasses the Canon 5D Mark II and in my view is also slightly better than the Canon 5D Mark III. Add to all of this, the ability to output uncompressed 1080p HD footage to an external recording device and it is obvious Nikon has come a long way on the video front. And as you might imagine at high ISOs the video quality is shockingly good. Nothing out there can touch it at high ISOs. I plan to do some nighttime video shoots this summer with the D4 to exploit its amazing high ISO abilities.

The only drawback to the Nikon D4 is that I have shot with and seen the images produced by the 36 MP Nikon D800. The eye-popping resolution of the D800 makes the 16 MP images produced by the D4 look rather average resolution-wise. Nonetheless, the D4 is my go-to, no holds barred, action and low light camera.

The Nikon D800

Nikon's Medium Format Killer

When Nikon first announced the D800, and its genre-busting 36 MP resolution, I think the entire photo industry was surprised—myself included. I didn't really feel like

I needed 36 MP resolution. Before it was announced, I was sure the D800 would be a 24 MP version of the Nikon D700. But it wasn't, and thank God the engineers at Nikon were smart enough to design and produce this camera. Previous to the D800 announcement, I had shot with the 39 MP Hasselblad H4D, so I had an idea of what that kind of resolution looks like. The D800 is every bit as good as the H4D-40, at least in terms of resolution, and it is also a lot easier to use. Once you see the phenomenal, detailed image quality of the D800 it is very hard to shoot with anything else.



The Nikon D800. Nikon has changed the ergonomics of the D800 slightly to match the D4. The camera is a touch more compact than the D700, but still feels very similar in the hand. Noticeably the D800 lacks the D4's dedicated focus point selectors on the back of the camera. With the Nikon D700, I added the MB-D10 battery grip to get a framing rate of 8 fps. With the D800, adding the battery grip only improves the shooting speed in the DX mode by 1 fps, hence I will keep the D800 as a smaller, lighter weight camera and forego the battery grip. No matter what the form factor, this might well be the most impressive camera that Nikon has ever produced. Having owned just about every pro camera since the F3, I don't say that lightly.

I have never, in my entire career, talked so exuberantly about any camera like I have the D800. On a recent trip to Dubai, where I was teaching a workshop with the Mentor Series Photo Treks with fellow pro photographer David Tejada, we talked incessantly about the Nikon D800. David had just gotten his D800 right before the workshop and every day we would remark on how incredible the camera, and its amazing image quality, was compared to everything else we had ever used. With that said, let's move onto some of the other aspects of the camera since there is a lot more to talk about than just the excellent image quality.

I consider what the engineers at Nikon have done with the D800 to be a miracle of some sort. In general, when you increase the resolution of a camera you also increase the amount of noise at high ISOs. Hence, I thought, as I am sure most of us did, that the D800 would be very noisy at high ISOs. Well, I was wrong. The D800 has significantly less noise at high ISOs than my Nikon D700,

which has one-third the resolution and the same size sensor as the D800! I have no idea how Nikon did this. Amazingly, the lack of noise at high ISOs is not that far behind the Nikon D4. ISO 2,000 on the D800 is about the same

as the ISO 6400 on the D4. Considering that the D800 has more than twice the resolution, that is truly amazing. The Nikon engineers have redefined what is possible with high-resolution sensors. And obviously the folks at DxO Mark were also impressed since they gave the Nikon D800 the top spot in their rankings among all digital cameras on the market, including all of the medium format cameras, some of which have 80 MP sensors!

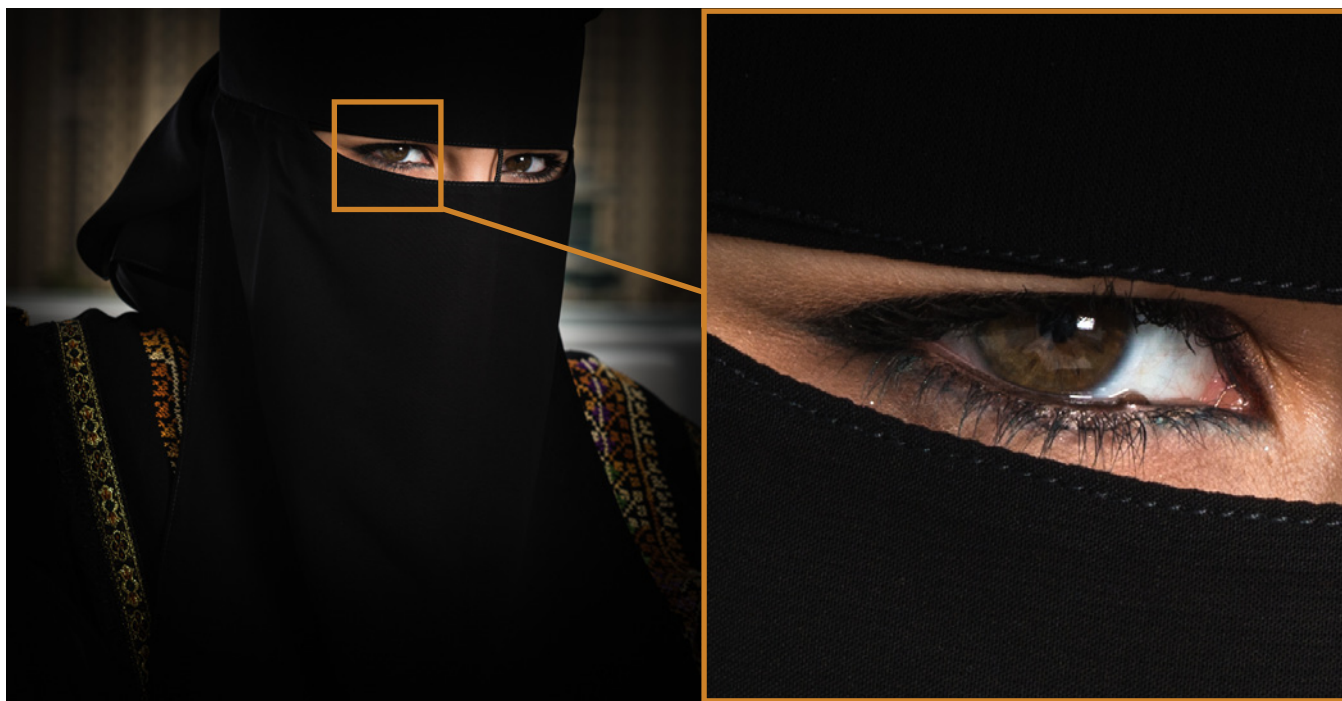
[Note: The Nikon D4 ranked third on the DxO Mark sensor rankings. The Nikon D800 was in first place and second place was taken by the 80-megapixel Phase One

IQ180 Digital Back. That is pretty amazing considering the D800 sells for less than 1/10th the price of the IQ180. All of the other high-resolution medium format cameras scored worse than either of these new Nikons!]

The D800 also has one of the widest dynamic ranges of any camera on the market—as confirmed by the DxO Mark tests. In tandem with the D800's phenomenal color fidelity, the dynamic range really helps out in all shooting scenarios and especially in contrasty lighting situations. This results in more detail in the both the shadows and highlights of every image. Combine the wide dynamic range with the 36 MP resolution and the low noise at high ISOs and you start to see why this camera got the top spot in the DxO Mark rankings.

On the video front, the D800 shines in a similar manner to the D4. I have not seen any huge differences in the 1080p HD video produced by the D800 versus the D4, save for the fact that there is marginally less noise at high ISOs in the video produced by the D4. If anything, the HD video produced by the D800 might even be slightly sharper than that from the D4. And the sensor in the D800 has a slightly wider dynamic range than the D4 sensor, which comes in handy in contrasty light. Again, I have to say that the video quality is unmatched by any other DSLR on the market in my testing.

In terms of the camera body, the D800 is just as robust as the venerable D700. Even with a pop-up flash, which I use quite a bit to trigger my Nikon speedlights, the



Above (left) is a portrait I shot in Dubai. The image was cropped square—only the sides of the image were cropped out. Above (right) is a 100% crop of the model's eye so you can see the detail. You will have to zoom in to 200% on this PDF to see the image at 100%. The detail this camera produces is astounding.

camera is well sealed from dust and moisture. The D800 overall is very similar to the D700. As with the D4, the autofocus has been improved slightly and seems a bit faster and more accurate. All in all, the D800 is a tough, pro-caliber camera and will not have any problems when it comes to taking on the elements.

With all that resolution, you might expect a few limitations on the frame rate and you would be right. The D800 can only shoot at 4 fps at full resolution. In DX mode, which provides a resolution of 15.2 MP, the camera can fire at up to 5 fps. As a sports photographer, 4 fps is not that exciting. It is quite slow. But this isn't a sports camera. By comparison, the 1.2 fps of the Hasselblad H4D, seems glacially slow when compared to the D800. For some adventure sports, like rock climbing and mountaineering, the 4 fps framing rate is plenty fast. For other sports like surfing, mountain biking and kayaking it seems glacially slow. Hence, as you can imagine, I am still working out when to shoot with the D800 and when to switch over to the D4. Obviously for portrait, lifestyle and landscape photography I am going to reach for the D800.

I would have thought that the high-resolution sensor on the D800 would tax my lenses a lot more than it does. To be sure, if you are not using the top-end glass available from Nikon you will see it in your images. My Nikkor zooms, including the 14-24mm f/2.8, 24-70mm f/2.8 and 70-200mm f/2.8, are all stellar on the D800. I will say that you also have to use exceptional camera technique to get the best image quality out of this camera. The camera is especially susceptible to motion blur. Hence, it is a good thing that there is very low noise at high ISOs. In low-light situations, I don't hesitate to crank up the ISO up to 1600, 3200 or even 6400 when needed.

Shooting with the D800, one needs to think of it as a large 6x7 medium format camera or even a large format camera since its image quality is on par with those larger formats.

In terms of image quality, the D800 is highly likely the best DSLR ever produced by any camera manufacturer so far. And, yes, I am aware of how extreme that statement sounds. But if you shoot with the camera for only a few minutes and then download the raw files you too will understand what a revolution this camera has ushered in for digital SLRs. I am not the only one who has made bold statements about this camera being the best I have ever used. Michael Reichmann, who is a meticulous photographer and the founder of the well-known and respected website Luminous-Landscape.com, has made similar statements in his review of the Nikon D800. He has stated, "In fact, I believe that this camera is so exceptional, in so many ways, that it will force the rest of the camera industry to up its game—big time. No, it's not perfect. The grip will be found to be too small for some, and the frame rates too slow for others. But other than that, and a few quibbles, this is a truly excellent camera. When used casually with ordinary glass it will satisfy just about anyone. When used with meticulous technique and the very best glass it is simply awesome, and I have never used that word in print before in relation to any camera or [medium format camera] back. The D800/E really is that good." To read the rest of his review check out his [D800/E Initial Field Impressions article](#).

In every sense, Nikon has hit more than a home run with the D800. It is a game changer for digital SLRs. And because of the amazing dynamic range and resolution, I have to say that I am quite a bit more excited about the

D800 than I am the D4. The D4 is a great camera, don't get me wrong, and it will serve me extremely well for my adventure sports work. But, in terms of image quality, the D800 is in a league by itself.

The D800 is also a medium format killer. I don't know why anyone would spend the money on a \$40,000 medium format camera unless they need more megapixels or really want that medium format depth-of-field look. For some, medium format will still be worth it, but I am betting the number of people that opt for a medium format back just dwindled to a very low number. I don't want to see Hasselblad or Phase One go out of business, but the playing field has just changed and they better get their R&D teams working overtime to figure out how they can differentiate their cameras from the D800. \$3,000 for a D800 or \$20,000 for a Hasselblad H4D-40? In my testing, I would be hard pressed to tell the images apart. Here's hoping Hasselblad and Phase One can figure out how to get exceptional high ISO performance similar to that of the D800, because this is just one of many areas where the medium format cameras suffer badly.

I realize I am completely gushing about the D800 here, like I have never before gushed in any other equipment review in this newsletter before. You literally have to shoot with the camera and see the images to believe just how amazing they are. There is a very good reason it got the top spot in the DxO Mark testing—it is just that good!

Wrapping Up


Making Sense of the New Gear

Nikon has hit two home runs with the D4 and the D800. It is certainly a great time to be a Nikon shooter. As I said

in the D800 review, I am still figuring out which camera to pull out of the camera bag when shooting some sports. Honestly, the image quality of the D800 is so good it overshadows the speed and versatility of the D4. I find myself shooting with the D800 quite a bit more than the D4 these days, but that may just be because I have been shooting lifestyle, portraits and architectural landscapes lately—as can be seen in the images from Dubai in this newsletter.

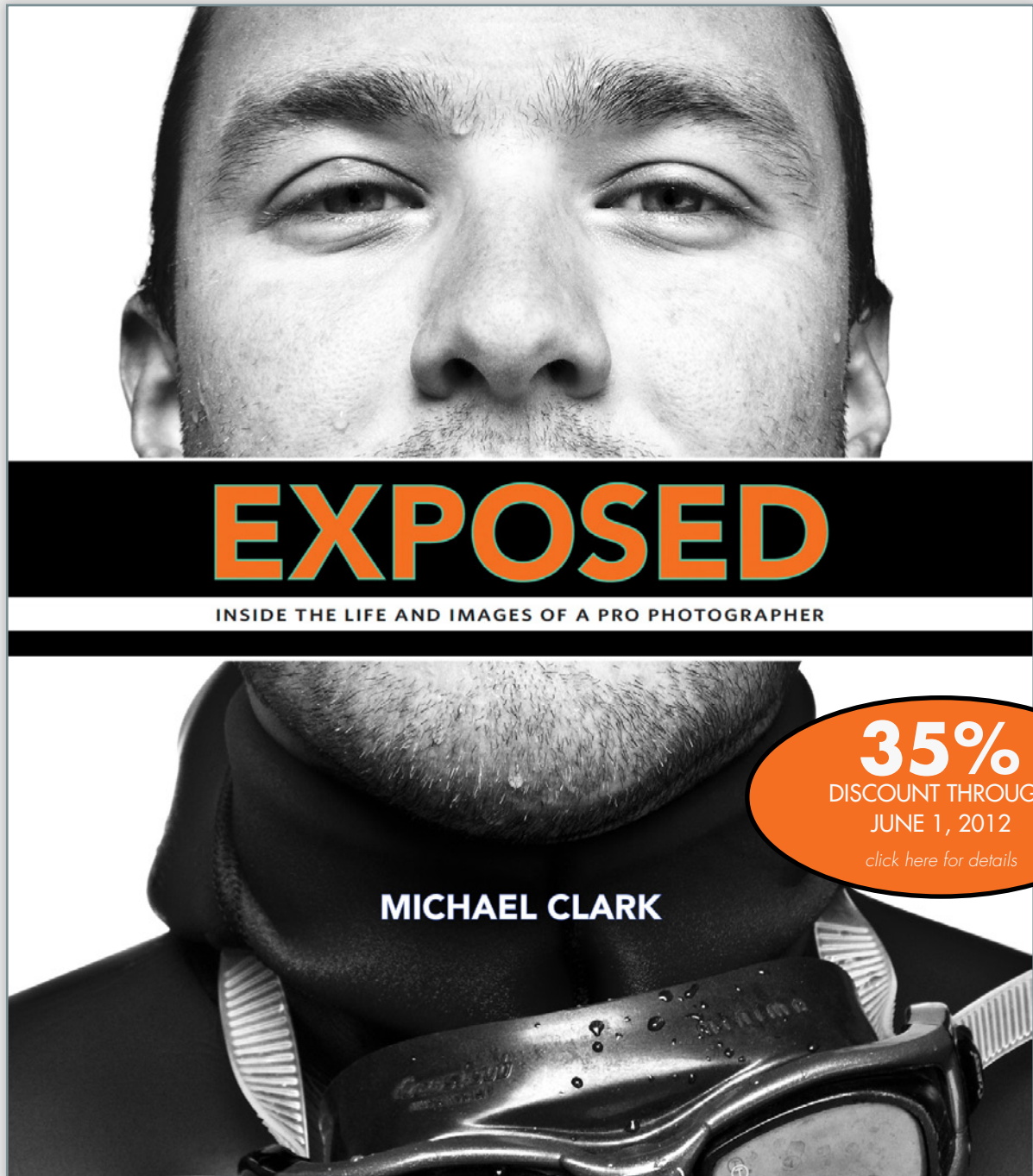
Of note, once I got these new cameras, I sold my old Nikons immediately. The image quality from the new cameras is far superior to my old gear, and hence, I didn't feel the need to hold onto the D700 and D300 I have been using for years now. I cannot say enough good things about these new cameras. I am completely blown away to be blunt. As a pro, I know it isn't the camera that matters, but when you are striving for the best image quality possible the camera matters in this digital age.

I am sure there are some that will ask, and with good reason, do we really need a camera that shoots 36 MP? I understand, and on some level I agree with the premise that 36 MP might be a bit over the top. But when you see the images, any thought as to whether or not you need the 36 MP resolution of the D800 flies out the window. The latest Nikon ad is the most truthful ad I have seen in a long time. It says, "Sorry, but you're going to want to re-shoot everything you've ever shot." And, well, I do and I wish it were possible! End of Story.

For more information on the Nikon D4 and the D800 visit the [Nikon website](#). Note that I did not discuss the D800E version here, as I have not had the opportunity to test it out. I am sure it is, like the D800, similarly amazing. 

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Above is the "Valigostudio" case for the 13-inch MacBook Pro.

Last fall I was honored to be able to shoot an advertising campaign for a German start up company named Lifstil. “Lifstil” is an Icelandic word, which means lifestyle. Lifstil manufactures extremely tough and durable portable cases for Apple laptop computers out of high-end materials used to make snowboards. They make a variety of cases for all of Apple’s offerings including iPads, and 13-inch, 15-inch and 17-inch laptops. And, as you can see in the images of their cases they offer them in a variety of colors—both radical and sublime. The odds are good that you have never heard of Lifstil, but I am willing to bet that their product will catch your attention.

These cases are without a doubt the coolest laptop cases I have ever seen or used. I was given one of the prototypes while shooting the assignment and I have been using it for over six months now. The cases are custom tailored to each laptop size and the elegant padding inside each case hugs your precious laptop or iPad as if it was made of gold. They protect your computer from just about anything but a full submersion in water—and they weigh a lot less than a similar sized Pelican case. These cases are now available in Europe and the USA online at www.lifstil.com. They are not inexpensive, but as with everything in life, you get what you pay for—and these are fantastically well made. I cannot recommend these cases highly enough and I am sure they will become a hot product here soon if they haven’t already.

For the ad campaign, I was asked to shoot adventure sports images of four different sports: rock climbing, mountain biking, surfing and snowboarding. The client needed action, portrait and lifestyle images of each athlete or groups of athletes. The kicker was that they needed the images shot in late summer and early fall, which

presented a problem for the surfing and snowboarding images. In the northern hemisphere, there are still the occasional swells that roll through in September and provide decent surfing, but the best waves usually come through in the winter. September is about the worst possible time to shoot snow sports in the U.S.A. The client did not have the budget to fly the entire crew to Chile or New Zealand for this shoot. Luckily for the client, I was already headed to Tahiti to shoot big wave surfing when they contacted me. Hence, they would get some stellar images from one of the most incredible waves in the world without having to pay for my expenses, since those were already covered by another client.

Aside from the surfing shoot in Tahiti last August, most of the assignment was shot over four very long days last September in California and Oregon. We shot four sports in three very long days and had an extra travel day built into the schedule to get up to Mt. Hood for the snowboarding shoot. It was an incredibly compressed shooting schedule and we had to make the most of it. One of the toughest parts of the assignment was finding a location to shoot snowboarding in September, which as you can imagine in North America is tough—unless you are willing to travel to northern Alaska. We did manage to find a snowboarding camp on Mt. Hood, near Portland, Oregon that had year-round snow on a glacier. The snow was very soft but they kept a groomed jump built year round for training purposes. In the end it worked out perfectly. I just had to choose the angle I shot from wisely so as not to reveal the lack of snow on the rocky background.

Most of the images were shot in and around the Los Angeles/Ventura area. We shot rock climbing at Stoney

Point Park in Chatsworth, California. Stoney Point Park is an old school climbing area in the heart of a city and it also happens to be where many of the American rock climbing masters like Yvon Chouinard cut their teeth. Yet again, it would have been much easier to shoot the rock climbing portion of the assignment in Red Rocks (near Las Vegas, NV) or in Joshua Tree National Park, but September is not a good month to shoot at those areas since they are blazing hot. And, since we had such a compressed shooting schedule we needed to shoot everything possible in the Los Angeles area. As is often the case in this profession, it all comes down to solving problems for the client so that they can get the images they need within their budget.

Because the rock climbing was added to the shoot after we had planned everything out, we ended up shooting the rock climbing and the mountain biking on the same day. We shot the

rock climbing on the first day of the assignment at dawn. The mountain biking portion was shot in the Lake Elsinore area, just south of Los Angeles, later that same day. As you can imagine this made for a very long first day. In fact, the first day of the assignment was a 22-hour day. I woke up at 3 AM to meet up with Lydia McDonald, our rock climber, and the client, at Stoney Point Park and got back to the hotel at 1 AM.

Lake Elsinore is about two hours from Stoney Point Park. We did a lot of driving that first day. Our mountain biker, and downhill, expert was Anthony Solesbee, and we were on his home turf. Before the assignment I had spoken

with him about what the client wanted, in terms of terrain and action. Because we were literally on the hillside behind his house, he was able to take us to a variety of locations that allowed us to get “airborne” shots of Anthony in action. By using strobes to freeze the action at the end of the day, I was able to get dramatic images against a colorful sky (as on the opposite page).

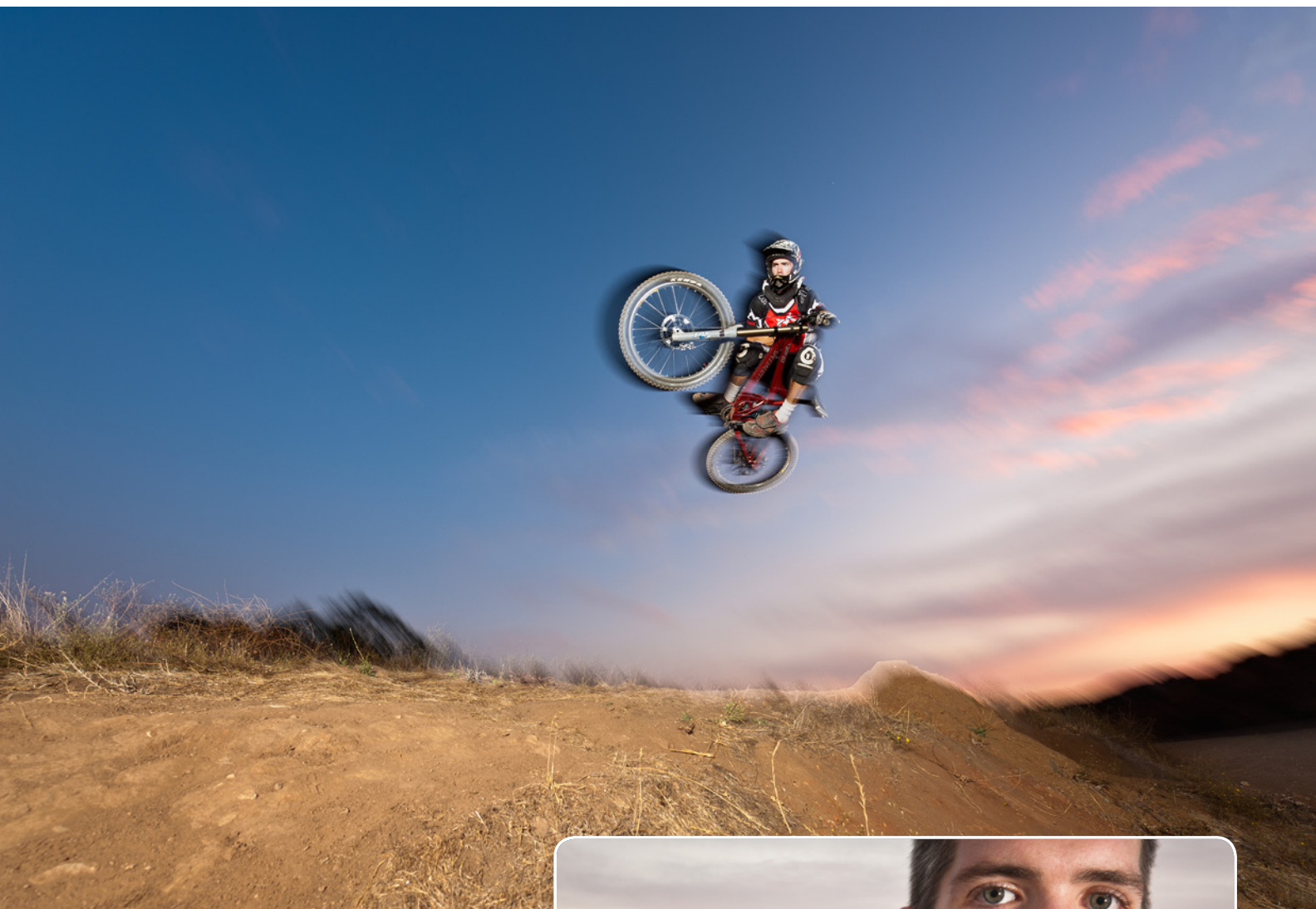
The next day we were up at 5 AM to shoot surfing at Oxnard Shores just south of Ventura. Needless to say, we were burning the candle at both ends on this assignment. I had forewarned the client weeks beforehand that the possibility of good waves would be extremely low. As I

had predicted, the waves were barely more than a foot or two tall. And on top of that, thick clouds blocked the morning light and it was raining lightly. These were the worst possible conditions for shooting surfing. I was comforted by the fact

that a month earlier I had gotten some stellar surfing images in Tahiti for the client, but that didn’t change the fact that we still had to go out and shoot on a less than ideal day. Such is the deal when shooting assignments.

To make the waves look bigger I swam out and shot from the water with a fisheye lens. I spent a few hours swimming with the surfers and got a few shots, but the light was so horrible that they were nothing to get excited about. Later that day we shot lifestyle and portrait images on the beach. Our surfers Daniel Bleicher, Rick Alter and Leah Christensen were troopers and hung in there all afternoon even though the conditions went from bad to

“As is often the case in this profession, it all comes down to solving problems for the client so that they can get the images they need within their budget.”



Above: Anthony Solesbee getting some serious air off a small kicker while downhill mountain biking near Lake Elsinore, California. Right: A portrait of downhill mountain biker Anthony Solesbee.





Above: Pro surfer Dylan Longbottom riding the tube of a sizable wave at Teahupo'o, Tahiti. Right: A portrait of California-based surfer Rick Alter. Opposite page: On the top left is a "Snake Red" iPad case and on the top right is a "Snake Red" MacBook Pro laptop case. Both of the cases on the bottom are the "White Glossy" case for the 13-inch MacBook Pro. These are only two of fifteen different designs. The graphics they have chosen for the cases are really quite beautiful. And of course you can choose a design that matches your personality.



worse. Once it started raining in earnest we pulled the plug. We had gotten all that we could and the client was happy with our efforts. In the end, even though I delivered some amazing surfing images from Tahiti, the client opted for some surfing images shot at the same California location from a few years before.


The next day felt like a rest day traveling to Mt. Hood. When we arrived it was raining sideways and I started to pray for clear skies for our shoot the next day. I didn't want to get skunked two days in a row. The next morning dawned clear, but we had arranged to do the shoot in the afternoon because of the orientation of the jump. Slowly, the clouds started to build up and roll in as the morning came and went. I was quite nervous and I could see the client was as well. Luckily, that afternoon, the clouds dissipated enough for us to get what we wanted. Our athlete, an ex-pro Burton snowboarder, Colin Langlois, was very professional and on command could launch just about any trick we requested off the 40-foot jump.

The client used a large variety of images on their website. They also used a super-saturated color treatment for all of the images, which is all the rage right now in Germany. [Note: I have had two assignments with German clients recently and both are using super-saturated color

treatments for their ad campaigns.] You can see the color treatment applied to the images on Lifstil's [website](#). The super-saturated colors definitely give the images an edgy feeling, which is what the client wanted. They wanted to convey to the customer that these cases provide serious protection for your computer or tablet—so much so, that taking your computer with you on your next adventure, wherever that may be, is not as risky as it might be with a normal laptop case.



My thanks to all the athletes that helped us create these images: Lydia McDonald, Colin Langlois, Anthony Solesbee, Daniel Bleicher, Rick Alter and Leah Christensen. Without your talents these images would not exist. I would be remiss if I didn't also thank Rebecca Schatten at Arpen Productions for her help in

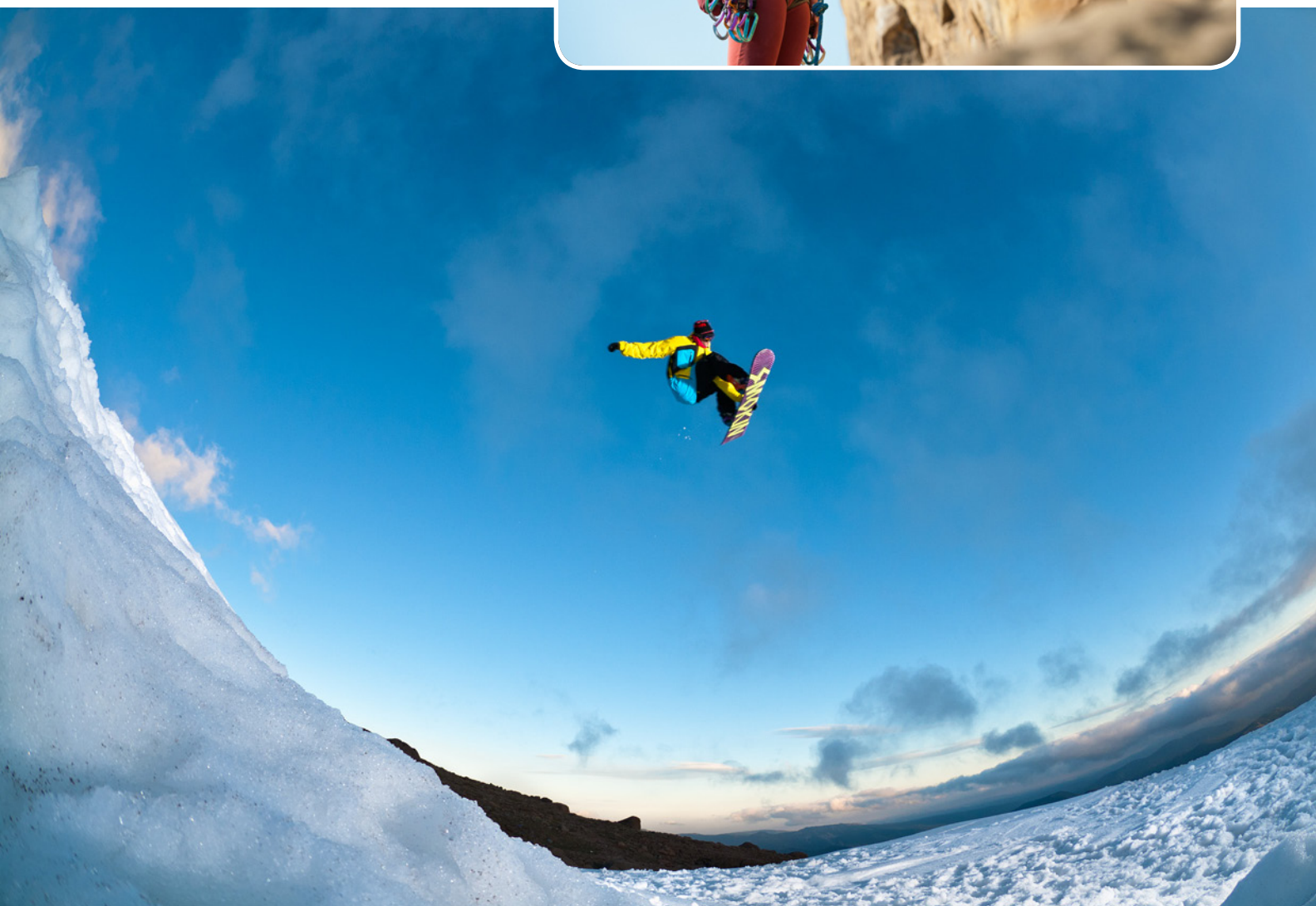
tracking down models, locations and dealing with a large part of the production for this assignment. Thank you to Oliver Hellriegel at Lifstil for making such a stellar product and hiring me to create images to help promote it. And finally to Jessica Williers at Raumbrand for your tireless work on this project. If you travel with a laptop, and want to protect it, you will not be disappointed with the Lifstil cases. I can't tell you how much I love my Lifstil laptop case. It goes with me on all of my adventures now. Check out the Lifstil cases at www.lifstil.com. 

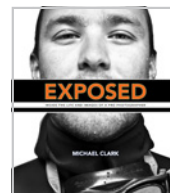


Above: Lydia McDonald rock climbing at Stoney Point Park in Chatsworth, California. Right: Colin Langlois posing for a portrait while snowboarding on Mount Hood near Portland, Oregon.



*Right: Lydia McDonald checking out the route while rock climbing at Stoney Point Park in Chatsworth, California.
Below: Professional snowboarder Colin Langlois getting some serious air off a 40-foot jump on Mount Hood near Portland, Oregon.*





excerpt

Be Prepared to Suffer

An excerpt from my new book, Exposed: Inside the Life and Images of a Pro Photographer

This is an excerpt from Chapter 13 of my book Exposed: Inside the Life and Images of a Pro Photographer, that has just been released by PeachPit. The book aims to strip away some of the glamour and mystery associated with the life of a pro photographer, and in my case specifically, the genre of adventure photography. Additionally, the book also tells the stories behind the images for 16 images, including how each was created, the equipment used and how each image was processed using Adobe Lightroom and Adobe Photoshop. The book is available via [PeachPit's website](#), [Amazon](#) and [Barnes and Nobles](#). Without further ado, here is Chapter 13.

As you will notice, I chose to leave this topic until late in the book because it isn't an upbeat chapter. It is a reality check—and an intense one at that. By now, I'm sure you've realized that shooting in some genres of photography can involve a fair amount of suffering. Such distress builds character—or at the very least it makes for an interesting story, which was half the premise behind this book. Not every photo shoot involves suffering, and certainly not every genre of photography involves suffering, although I could argue that fashion shoots involve some mental anguish—or at least they would for me. What I mean by be prepared to suffer is that getting the image is not always a pleasant experience. As told in this book, I alone have hundreds of tales of woe associated with my

images. On some shoots a little agony is just the price of admission. Getting the image is a matter of ignoring those niggling details and getting on with the job.

Whether you're carrying a 100-pound-plus backpack up the backside of a 3000-foot cliff in Yosemite National Park, sitting on a rock-hard fishing boat for 12 hours while shooting big wave surfing, or just spending 14 hours straight in front of a computer, working as a professional adventure sports photographer can and often does have its fair share of trials and tribulations. When I think of suffering to get an image, the first genre of photography that comes to mind is war photography. War photographers risk their lives to record a moment so the rest of the world can see what is going on. The hope is that their images will somehow affect those who see them and help to stop whatever atrocity is taking place. For adventure photographers, any suffering involved to get an image is not nearly as noble. I'm not trying to save anyone's life with my images, but I do hope to inspire viewers to live their life to the fullest. Although a wedding or portrait photographer may not "suffer" while working, the point is that the image is the most important product of a photo shoot, and any difficulties or uncomfortable realities that occur during the shoot are secondary to the image.

To deal with the more torturous situations, for example

the Patagonia Expedition Race, discussed in Chapter 3, I procure the best gear I can find to limit my exposure to the elements and the obvious risks involved on each photo shoot. It isn't that I am able to anticipate every situation, but more the case that I have learned from experience. I've had to deal with frost-nipped fingers and toes while shooting ice climbing, becoming hypothermic while shooting sea kayaking (in the icy waters of the Beagle Channel), and nearly having my head split open by an errant surfboard fin. Experience is a good teacher. It has taught me that even the most expensive outdoor apparel and protective gear are a lot cheaper than a few days in the hospital. I don't try to put myself into situations that are dangerous, but when shooting adventure sports, I often find myself in situations that are potentially hazardous. As I've mentioned a few times in this book, sometimes the best perspective is the hardest place to get to, and often being in that position involves more risk (or suffering).

Experience is a good teacher. In some cases there isn't any risk to deal with. One scenario that comes to mind is shooting surfing from the beach. Standing on the beach, the only risk you have to deal with is getting sunburned. When I shoot big wave surfing on the north shore of Hawaii, a lot of people say to me, "Oh, you have the life." What they don't understand is that shooting surfing is real work, whether standing on the beach or shooting in the water. I am not out there on vacation. On my last trip to Hawaii, I arrived and spent the first two entire days

shooting from the beach from before sunrise until after sunset, a total of 11 hours both days. I never left the beach until it was dark. During these shoots, there are no lunch or bathroom breaks at a nearby restaurant or gas station. You use the bathroom on the beach (in the bushes or in one of the houses lining the beach if you know the locals), and you bring all the food and water you need for the day. So although it sounds glamorous to shoot surfing, after five or six hours of standing on the beach trying to concentrate and not miss the wave of the day, you can understand that the reality is quite different for the working pro. Afternoons in particular can be difficult when the sun comes around and there is no shade to be found. It is usu-

ally about that time when you run out of water, start to get dehydrated, and your concentration starts to lapse. On this past trip, after two days I was completely exhausted.

Shooting surfing from the water is even more ex-

hausting and obviously involves more risk than shooting from the beach. If you are swimming in big waves, like on a decent day at Pipeline, you might be swimming and dodging waves and surfers for anywhere from a few hours to six or seven hours. Even if you are not swimming, shooting from a boat or a jet ski can still be more difficult than shooting from the shore. On a trip to Tahiti, where the opening image to this chapter was shot, I spent five long days shooting for 12 hours straight, from sunup to sundown, on a fishing boat. We never went in for lunch, bathroom breaks were nonexistent, and we were sitting on a rockhard boat deck riding up and down the same

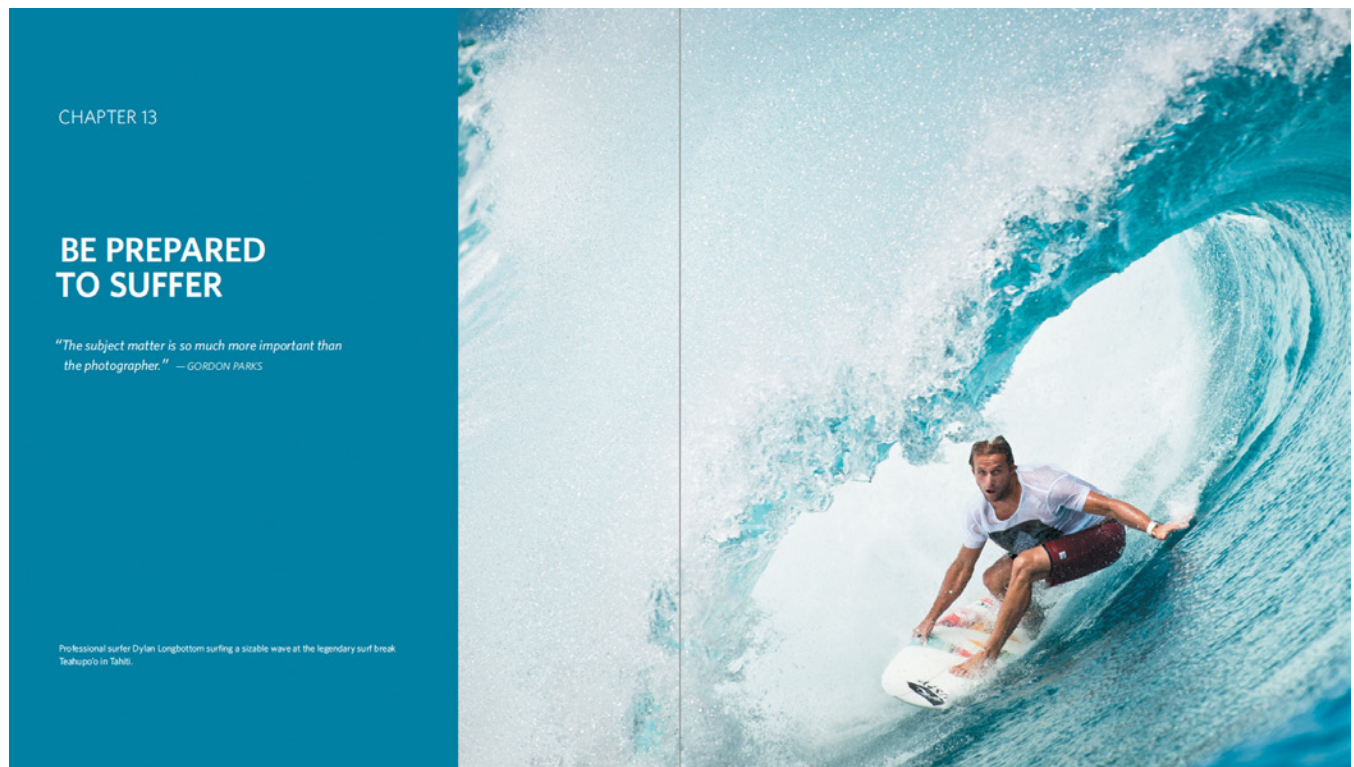
"On some shoots a little agony is just the price of admission. Getting the image is a matter of ignoring those niggling details and getting on with the job"

waves the surfers were riding right in front of us. After a few days, my butt was so bruised and sore that I could barely sit down.

But even with all of the risk and difficulties, I have to say that I've been blessed to be able to visit so many amazing places, as well as to not get injured. I've certainly had some close calls. And in my estimation, I should have died at least three or four times by now. It's obvious to me that in those tight spots a higher power has been watching over me. To that end, I'll tell the story of how I nearly died while shooting an assignment for Climbing Magazine in the summer of 2003. This story gets to the heart

of this chapter's title because in this case, even though I came very close to dying, I still had to finish shooting the assignment.

On the third day of this assignment, the climbers and I started hiking at 5 a.m. in the dark in the Black Hills of South Dakota. We had already experienced two rough days of difficult weather. I was in desperate need of good light to capture the images I needed, and the bright stars were a good indicator that the dawn would be clear. Larry Shaffer and Cheryl Mayer came highly recommended as two of the best "traditional" climbers in the area, and they didn't disappoint.



The opening spread of Chapter 13. Image Caption: Professional surfer Dylan Longbottom looking for the exit while surfing a sizable wave at the legendary surf break Teahupo'o in Tahiti. The opening quote from Gordon Parks reads, "The subject matter is so much more important than the photographer."

My plan was to shoot East Gruesome Spire from the side at first light as the climbers ascended to the top of the spire. Then I would ascend a fixed rope, put in place by the climbers, using mechanical ascenders. Once on top of the spire, I would photograph the climbers from my vantage point atop East Gruesome Spire as they climbed the Eye Tooth, an adjacent 250-foot tall spire. Although it is only rated 5.7, a relatively easy climb, the Eye Tooth was spectacularly exposed and would provide viewers with a very good feeling for what it was like to climb in the Cathedral Spires. With this game plan set, Larry soloed the short first pitch (climbing without the use of a rope or any gear to protect him in case of a fall) of the 250-foot tall East Gruesome Spire as I moved into position to shoot from higher up in the gulley.

At the top of the gulley, the winds were howling and the temperatures were brutally cold. I was

shaking so violently that I could barely keep the camera steady. (After this experience, I bought a huge down jacket to make sure I never shivered that much on a photo shoot again, although I have since gotten very cold and have even become hypothermic on a shoot. What's that saying about the best laid plans?) Once the climbers reached the top of the spire, which was the size of a large desktop, they fixed my static rope and I prepared to ascend the line. For those not acquainted with climbing techniques, jumaring, also known as jugging, is slang for ascending a fixed rope. It is a technique where the climber clamps mechanical ascenders onto the rope that slide upwards and lock with a camming device. Hence, with a

pair of ascenders and some nylon webbing you can ascend a fixed rope without having to climb the rock face. Climbing photographers use this technique so they can get into position and because it also frees up their hands to manipulate a camera.

At about 8:30 a.m. I started jumaring to the top of East Gruesome Spire. My 60-meter static rope hung free from the gently overhanging wall for the first 160 feet. To get into position as quickly as I could so the light wouldn't get too harsh on the Eye Tooth, I ascended as quickly as possible. Ascending a free-hanging fixed line uses a motion that is a lot like jumping up and down. It can put a lot of

stress on a rope, which is why we use static ropes that don't stretch very much and are much more durable than dynamic climbing ropes.

Thirty feet from the top I looked up and saw that

my rope was bent over a three-inch long finger of quartz pointing straight out from the wall, approximately 12 feet above my position. My first reaction was to push off the wall and get the rope off the crystal. As I leaned out from the wall, I noticed that my rope seemed strangely thin where it ran over the crystal. I was looking at frayed core material. A climbing rope consists of a braided core and an outer sheath. By far, the strongest part of the rope is the core, which usually has six or seven strands. The sheath is a covering around the core and is meant to protect it from abrasion. It is not meant to be load bearing in any way. From my perspective, it appeared I was hanging from about one-third of the rope's sheath!

"I've certainly had some close calls. And in my estimation I should have died at least three or four times by now..."

I was stunned, but I didn't panic. It was sobering to think that my life would be over so quickly. I immediately started to pray. One third of a sheath couldn't hold me for more than a few seconds. I could already see my body falling away from the wall, and I was anticipating how it would feel. Gravity would engage instantaneously. My 35-pound camera pack would act as ballast. Upon impact, 180 feet below, the camera pack would break my back and slam my head and feet onto the granite slabs. I would have two seconds of free fall at most before I hit the ground. And I would be looking at the blue sky above me the entire time. I could hear the dull thud of my landing. And I was praying as I have never prayed before, certain that my time was up. I tried to call up to the climbers, who were still on top. I had to forcibly clear my throat just to speak. When I finally was able to yell, it was with noticeable urgency. I asked them to lower a rope to me as quickly as they could and put me on belay. I recall Larry saying, "Give me a moment, this could take a little time." I shouted back with a cracked and broken voice, "Lower the rope NOW! I'll tie in while you are putting me on belay."

Larry's face popped over the top and he understood the situation immediately. I can't remember how long it took to get the rope down to me. It was at least two or three minutes. During that time I held myself as still as I could on the holdless wall waiting for the rope to break.

My mind was racing and I realized I was praying out loud. Verses I had memorized from the Bible were floating through my mind—"... to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). I can't say I felt any peace. Endorphins and adrenaline kicked in. I was on autopilot, praying without even thinking, confessing my sins and preparing my-

self for the end.

The rope end dropped just in front of my face. I made the fastest tie-in of my life, while concentrating on my breathing to keep calm. Once secured, I jugged up and past the cut. When I got to the cut, I realized that some of the core was still intact but I just kept going. On top, Larry and Cheryl were looking at me, waiting for a reaction. My nervous comments gave away how I felt. Little else was said. Then they moved ahead with the plan, rappelling their ropes and starting up the Eye Tooth. It appeared that the crystal had cut half way through the core. Later, after cutting the rope open, I would find out that I was hanging from three of the seven strands of the core.

It was not until I was alone that I broke down. I started praying again, thanking God for His mercy. I must have prayed for 20 minutes or more. It seemed to calm me. And I knew I had to keep it together and concentrate on the images. Taking photographs was a diversion. I started to get excited about the images, and it forced me to think about composition, exposure, and focus instead of what had just happened.

When it came time to rappel off the top of the spire a few hours later, I was gripped. My faith in ropes had literally just taken a serious beating. Add to that the fact that I was rappelling on the same rope that was just cut, and you can imagine my concern. The rappel setup was perfectly safe. I had pulled up the damaged rope and tied it to another rope below the cut. Hence, I was not putting my life at risk a second time; it was just the fact that I was on high alert and very shaken by my earlier experience. I checked the anchors at least five times before I leaned back over the edge. Once I was on the ground I felt a huge

release. We continued shooting for the rest of the day, but thankfully, the architecture of the Spires was such that I could get above the climbers without having to get on a rope.

The next few days were intense after such a close call. Flowers looked brighter, the sky bluer, and life seemed surreal. I realized that every moment from then on was a gift. I no longer felt invincible. And death didn't seem as far away as it did before. It could come at any moment. And that forced me to stop and think about what is truly important.

A few days later, I was again 200 feet off the deck in the Cathedral Spires. Needless to say it was mentally challenging. I knew the "money shots" would be from above on the second pitch, about 300 feet off the ground, in the late afternoon light. I forced myself up there, even though my nerves were still frazzled. I said a prayer before I started juggling the second pitch, which made everyone take notice at the belay. Once we started shooting, I calmed down. I quickly realized that these could be the cover shots for the article, and that made me concentrate on the images.


To this day, I still get nervous when I hear a rope rubbing on rock, especially if I am hanging from it. But in retrospect, that incident has become a blessing. Every breath is a gift. It's a simple fact that someday we will all die. I

don't know if I am ready, but I am getting prepared.

This story was originally written for and published in Climbing Magazine because the magazine decided to publish my story along with the article. When I originally wrote this, my heart was palpitating, my hands were shaking so much it was hard to type, and I had goose bumps just remembering what it was like hanging, thinking and waiting. My shirt was soaked from sweat by the time I finished writing, and I felt sick to my stomach. While writing the story I tried to put myself back in that situation to capture what it felt like, and I was surprised at

how well I could remember every detail of those three or four minutes. While revising the story for this book I experienced a similar pounding heart rate and nauseous stomach. Almost ten years later that event is still a seminal experience in my life. On my desk, directly in front of me, I

have that section of cut rope as a reminder that our presence on this planet is a brief gust of wind.

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"As I leaned out from the wall, I noticed that my rope seemed strangely thin where it ran over the crystal. I was looking at frayed core material. It appeared I was hanging from about one-third of the rope's sheath."

portfolio





A Torturous Process

by Michael Clark

Writing a book is a tortuous process. I don't consider myself a writer, though I do write quite a bit. Between these newsletters and the three books I have written one might even say I write too much! I consider myself a storyteller of sorts and part of story telling is putting those stories down on paper. My latest book, Exposed: Inside the Life and Images of a Pro Photographer, is filled with stories. All of the stories in the book revolve around images and my experiences creating those images as well as some insights into the life of a pro photographer, which is not nearly as glamorous as it seems. This latest book was the biggest writing project I have ever worked on. It was also the longest.

Over the course of nine months, from July of 2011 until mid-March of 2012, I wrote chapters sporadically in between my busy assignment schedule. It was tough to concentrate on the book. I will admit that a chapter or more was written while sitting on a beach in Tahiti, where I was waiting a few days for the swell to come up. I was in Tahiti shooting for the book, TransWorld Surf magazine and also for Lifstil (see the article on that assignment in this newsletter). It was an exhausting and amazing trip. But, as you might expect, most of the book was written in an office—not nearly as exciting or scenic as Tahiti.

I am exhausted just thinking about the book. I am over it.

Strangely enough when people congratulate me on the new book, my response is, "Thank you." But inside, my response is "sure, whatever." At this point I am just happy to be done with the process. This latest book took everything I had to finish. I downloaded as much as I possible could into it.

This book was also the first one I have written where I am putting myself, my stories and my lifestyle out there for people to see—in some instances in great detail. It is autobiographical and revealing, just like my images. Because of that, this book was somewhat draining emotionally—not just because the process was difficult, but also because the last 15 years of my life are in that book. Creating photographs, in my mind, is a much easier process than writing a book. Having my images rejected by a client, because they don't fit the type of images they need, is one thing. Having this book out in the world exposing what my life is like is another thing completely. At every point in the writing process I made sure to include all the gory details so the reader can see exactly what it takes to "make it work" in this profession. The feedback on the book so far has been tremendously positive. On this project, I am holding my breathe, waiting to see how it is received. That reaction is really no different than shooting a big advertising assignment and waiting to see what the client thinks of the images. I hope you enjoy it.

parting shot



An image of Mahina Garcia running at sunset at Ke Iki beach on the north shore of Oahu, Hawaii, which was shot for the German underwear company Schiesser.

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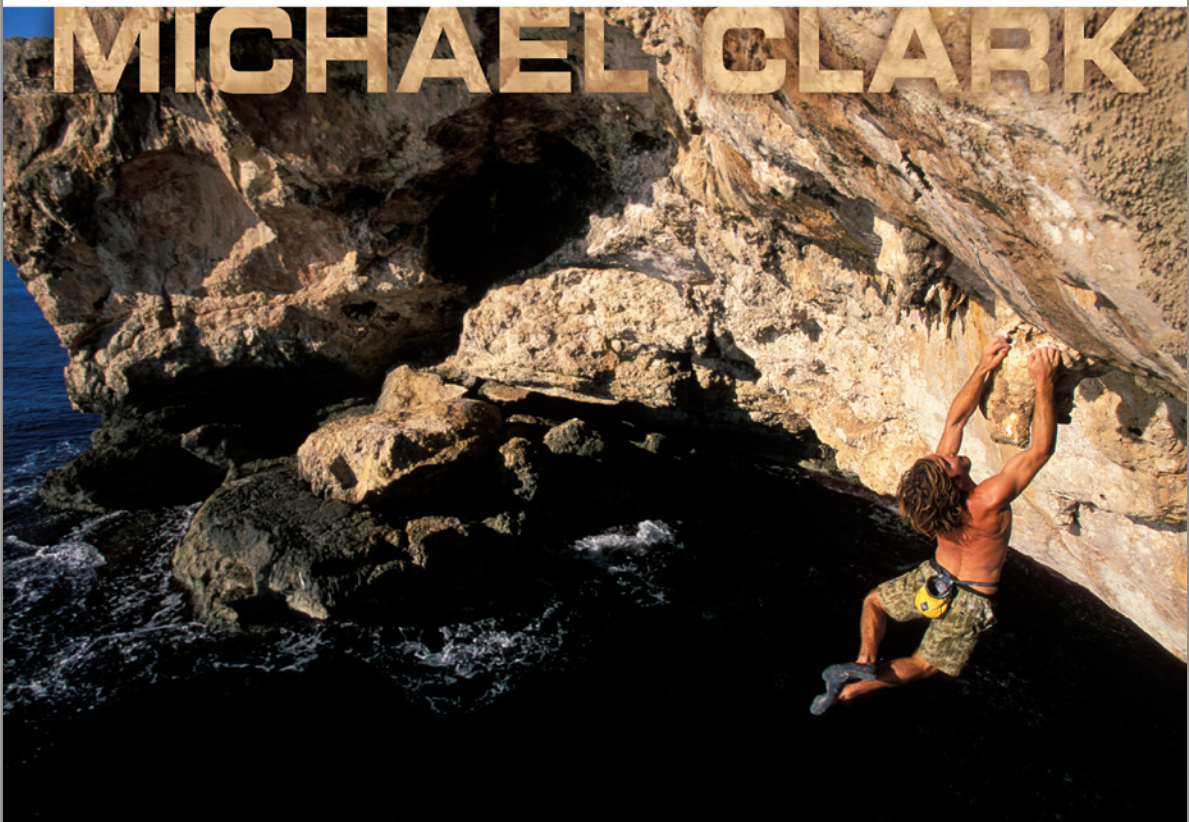


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