

Photo 245 – Nature and Landscape Class

Death Valley Itinerary:

February 25-28, 2010

GENERAL ADVISORIES

Below are some general advisories and guidelines to make this trip more pleasant and to protect both you and the camera equipment.

- **Clothing:** Be sure to bring clothes for all weather conditions from mid 70s to 80s and above during the days to 50° - 40° and below during the nights. When the sun goes down the temperature drops rapidly so even though it is not that cold, the temperature change can make it really uncomfortable. Hypothermia can occur at that temperature if your body chills and its core temperature starts to drop. So be prepared with vests, jackets, sweaters, whatever you like. (The actual forecast is for temps to be from mid 70s to mid 50s and no rain.) Losing core temperature can be life threatening in hours, sometimes minutes.
- **Sunrise/Sunset:** Dawn will start about 6 am, with Sunrise at roughly at 6:30 am. Sunset roughly at 5:30 pm this time of year with dusk light lasting until around 6:00 pm
- **Rain:** Rain is rare but even though it is unexpected it can occur anytime. Wind may whip dust and sand into the air. So make sure your camera gear is protected.
- **Fuel:** It is a long distance between sites on this park. At the last possible place, make sure your fuel tank is full. Gas is expensive in the park but it is available at several locations: Panamint Springs, Furnace Creek, and Stovepipe Wells and of course at Beatty where we will be staying as well as other communities on the outskirts of the park. Trust me on this, this is not a place to have to hike for gas.
- **Maps:** If you do not already have one, get a map of the park and study it so you will know approximately where you are at all times. As importantly, you need to have an idea of where you are in relation to other things – like ranger stations, fuel, emergency help, etc. Here is a link to the park service's map of Death Valley
 - www.nps.gov/deva/planyourvisit/upload/DEVAMap1a.pdf

Of course you can also get maps from Google Maps, and MapQuest.

- **Sunscreen:** The sun can be brutal if the sky is clear. Even on cloudy days it can be unremitting so bring sun screen and a hat or cap. If we can visit any of the few places where there is water, there will also very likely be flies and mosquitoes in abundance. We are well ahead of the really hot season but the sun is unremitting so bring sunscreen.

- **Dune Photos:** On the dunes it is incredibly easy to get turned around, especially when the sun goes down. Take a compass or GPS and make sure you know what it will look like going BACK to the car. From one day to the next, especially if the wind is blowing, the dunes can change quite a bit. So even if we visit them several times, do not rely on the last visit to remember your routes. Treat each hike as a brand new one. And remember hiking up and down dunes in loose sand is very tiring.
- **Water:** This is the desert. More, this is DEATH VALLEY. The name is no coincidence. Take lots of water. And carry snacks in the car or in your day pack as well. It takes several weeks to die from lack of food but going without food past our civilized eating periods lowers morale rapidly and diminishes our thinking ability as we focus more and more on being hungry. However, it only takes a day or so to die from lack of water and in the desert's dry climate that is accelerated. If you are thirsty you are already dehydrated. Take lots of water with you.
- **Film and Heat:** Do not leave film laying out in the car, in the trunk or glove box when you have hiked away for a shot. It can become heat fogged. Be sure and put it in a cooler or somewhere to protect it from excessive heat.
- **Snakes and Scorpions:** There are creatures here that can hurt you. Most of the snakes in this area are wary of humans and will try to avoid you if possible. But with the cooling nights they might be trying to soak up sunlight early in the morning and later in the afternoon. Mid day they will seek shade to avoid overheating. Be careful where you walk and where you put your hands. Do not crowd or harass a snake as even timid individuals will defend themselves and believe me you will not enjoy the experience if you are bitten.

If, in the off chance you become one of the very rare statistics of people bitten by a snake in this area, do NOT panic. It is extremely rare for an adult in reasonable physical condition to die following a snake bite. Even most of those rare fatalities actually die of a heart attack from the shock and fear from being bitten and not from the venom. Adult rattlesnakes can control the injection of venom and often deliver little of it in a defensive strike, reserving it for food strikes. So CALM DOWN. Most rattle venom is hemotoxic, i.e. it attacks the blood. So do not run or exert yourself or do anything to increase the pumping of blood throughout your system. If you are close to the car, let other people know what has happened and have them help you to the car then go to the nearest village for help. DO NOT IGNORE IT. Even if they do not pump any venom. The dried toxin on their fangs will create an unpleasant reaction. And even without this, you will have two deep puncture wounds to deal with. The odds are you will experience what doctors in their sadistic moments refer to as "discomfort" meaning it will hurt like blazes (think of having two nails driven into you). But just remember, the odds of it being fatal are *extremely* low. If you can keep your wits about you pay close attention to the snake and its colors and patterns to help the doctors with the right antivenin since there are several types of snakes in the area and at least one of them has an interesting cocktail of venoms in their arsenal.

Remember, unless you are a trained medical professional do NOT try to suck out the

poison, cut yourself to bleed it out, or apply a tourniquet beyond something light to simply slow down the flow of blood not stop it. If we are a ways from help you will do more damage with a too tight tourniquet than you will help.

The site of the bite will quickly start to swell and discolor. But self treatment in a panic mode will likely only result in further tissue damage, more pain, and more work for the medics. If you have a snake kit then you might use the suction instrument to remove as much poison as possible but otherwise let the doctor or nurse handle it.

Do the same if you are stung by a scorpion. This little beasties can deliver an excruciatingly painful sting but it is even far less dangerous than the rattlers. Get to a medical facility at the earliest opportunity. But unless you happen to be allergic to their venom about all that will happen is swelling and pain.

- **Carpooling in the Park:** To as great an extent as possible we will carpool around the park to save fuel and to make sure that everyone has a partner in case of emergencies. If you strike out on your own or even in a lone vehicle, **MAKE SURE** that someone else knows your route/destination plans and intended return time. Once underway do not vary from that given “flight plan.” If something should happen such as a vehicle failure or injury, you will be glad that at some point you will be missed and they will know where to look.

DAILY ITINERARY

Below is a tentative daily shooting itinerary for the trip. Use it as a guideline since weather and road conditions may cause some last minute changes. Any changes will be announced at the meeting places noted.

Thursday February 25: Travel Day and maybe some shooting.

If you have arrived and feel like it, you might join me. If I arrive in time I intend to go to the dunes east of Stovepipe Wells and just north of Hiway 190 for some sunset shooting. If I have less time I might try for a sunset at Zabriskie point and with even less time a sunset at Rhyolite.

Friday February 26: Shoot Day.

Meet for breakfast at the restaurant at Furnace Creek Ranch at 8:00 am. I'll have ascertained what the road into the racetrack is like at that time. If the road is passable for 2WD cars then we will head to The Racetrack after breakfast. It is a long drive, the last 20 miles or so is on dirt with sharp rocks (and the questionable part of the road). Bring lunch in case we are there past feeding time. If we are not there long (for example if the light is not good, the aliens that move the rocks attack us, etc.) we can grab something at Scotty's castle. We will also go to Ubehebe Crater this day. If weather permits this will take most of the day.

If we cannot make it to the Racetrack due to road conditions then we will have an alternative day to be announced at breakfast. Probably it will include Salt Creek and other interesting areas such as Twenty Mule Team Canyon, and Dante's view.

Afternoon and early evening we can try the Stovepipe Wells dunes or you may shoot wherever you would like.

Saturday February 27: Shoot Day.

Meet at Zabriskie Point for dawn shooting. You should be there in the parking lot by about 6:00 am for the short walk up to the lookout. If the weather allowed us to do the Racetrack on Friday then today we will visit Salt Creek, Twenty Mule Team Canyon, Dante's View. Depending on how long we spend there we can hit Rhyolite and/or the old Marble Quarry of Carrera on the way back to Beatty. Or, we can try another sunset on the Dunes or even at Zabriskie Point.

Sunday February 28: Shoot and Travel Day.

Dawn Shooting at Bad Water. We'll watch the sun splash color on the Panamint range reflected in the still morning waters of Bad Water Basin, the lowest place in the continent. Then you will be free to visit or re-visit other close areas such as Artist's canyon with its multicolored mud hills, the Devil's Golf Course, or start your trip back to San Diego.

LODGING & CAMPING

We will be staying at the Motel 6 in Beatty, Nevada. Here is the information for that:

**Motel 6 (#4173)
550 US 95 North
Beatty, Nevada 89003
775-553-9090
GPS: N36 54.943 / W116 45.206**

I would recommend checking out of the motel early on Sunday or else you will have to travel all the way back to Beatty to check out, then turn around and head back south.

If you plan on camping, there are campgrounds all over the park. Check them out at:

<http://www.nps.gov/deva/planyourvisit/camping.htm>

Furnace Creek campgrounds is the most centrally located near the major cross roads and can accommodate anything from tents to motor homes.

ROUTES TO/FROM DEATH VALLEY

You are free to go to the park and the lodging by any route you choose. The shortest route straight to Beatty will be as follows:

1. **Take I-15 North to Baker. (This is a long stretch but is all 4-lane freeway. It goes through Victorville and Barstow before getting to Baker. Baker is a reasonable place for lunch. Fuel is ridiculously priced but will be from here on anyway.)**
2. **At Baker take CA 127 North. (This is right in the middle of town so is hard to miss since it also has signs "To Death Valley." This will take you past Death Valley Junction and generally skirts the park boundary.)**
3. **CA 127 becomes NV 373 but stay on it.**
4. **NV 373 "T"s into US 95. Turn left to go to Beatty.**
5. **In Beatty, US 95 makes a right turn on Main Street. Make that turn to stay on US 95.**
6. **Go about .4 miles and you will see the Motel 6 Sign.**

This total drive for this route is about 380 miles and can take about 6 hrs with light traffic. At 20 mpg and \$3.00 per gallon it will take about \$53.00 in gas. I have no idea what gas will be like in Baker or the park.

If you want to do another route, let someone know of your intended route and plan on calling them from the park or motel to let them know you have arrived. That way, should something happen in an area where you are out of touch, authorities will know where to look.

My guess (barring road construction or other road issues) is that the fastest return route is straight south out of the park to rejoin CA 127 to the town of Baker then you can simply follow southbound I-15 on into San Diego. That time of day you will probably run into the Sunday migration from Las Vegas to Los Angeles so be prepared for traffic. However another good route is to go out the west entrance or through Immigrant Canyon (West of Stovepipe Wells) then down the Trona road to 395. The ghost town of Ballarat is on that road as well as the Trona Pinnacles and other interesting sites.

CELL PHONES & TWO WAY RADIOS

I doubt there is much cell phone service in Death Valley since it is so far between main areas and villages. There should be good coverage along I-15 but unknown along the other highways.

If you have a family/business radio set it to channel 9 Security Code 12. That is where mine will be set and I will have them on especially in the park. The range for those radios is limited but when we are together shooting are not a bad way to stay in touch.