
Nature & Landscape Photography: Photo 245

Instructor: N. David King, Spring 2010

Basic Field Trip Ground Rules and Guidelines

For all Participants on Field trips in my classes here are my basic guidelines and rules for conduct and activities. Please read and understand these. Breaking them may subject you lowered grades, expulsion from the trip and might, in some cases place you or some other student in serious danger. So I am providing these for your reference and will treat them very seriously.

Field Trip Costs

The Nature and Landscape course is built around a series of photographic field trips. These field trips, like any trip, have costs associated with them. These include the obvious and out of pocket costs such as photo supplies, fuel, meals, and lodging, but also hidden costs such as auto depreciation and pro-rata costs of insurance and repairs. I have provided for you to download both itineraries and spreadsheets so you can estimate these costs for yourself not only for our class trips but also for future photo field trips as well.

Make sure you have enough cash/credit for emergencies as well as the anticipated costs and a contingency buffer for unexpected but non emergency spending.

Sharing Rides and Lodging

With the cost of fuel steadily rising, it is getting more and more expensive to take these trips. Unfortunately there are topics, such as the Landscape class itself, and location-based demonstrations that can only be done properly away from campus. However the costs to you can be reduced significantly if you carpool and, for overnights field trips, share lodging. This can reduce the costs by half and sometimes much more.

Just be sensible and careful about it both from a safety and a “good time” standpoint. I think most of our students are trustworthy and given the supervised nature of the trips would be on good behavior especially since their grades or continued presence on the field trip would be at stake. But before the actual trip I’d suggest getting to know them a little better so you can feel comfortable or so that the group dynamics on a long trip is positive for you.

When you ride/room share, either as the primary person or the secondary individuals, I would suggest making a list of all of the individuals involved. Give one to someone staying here and also give me a copy. On the copy list the names, cell phone and email addresses of the participants and addresses if you know them. Include the license number of the car. (Drivers: prepare and supply this data to your riders.)

And if you are lucky enough to find someone to let you ride with them remember *you are a guest* in their car. You may be helping to split the fuel costs but those are not the only costs the car owner will entail on the trip so you are getting a major break. Respect the owner's wishes about such things as music, smoking, stopping for pictures, etc. Because they agreed to let you ride share with them does not automatically mean they have to tolerate anything you do or say.

Room sharing means SHARING. If you room share with someone you will be expected to split the costs of the room proportionately as well as being a considerate roommate. If the other occupants wish to get to sleep early to prep for the next day, do not – do NOT – decide to go out partying and come in late drunk and boisterous. The other occupants are within their rights to evict you from the room whether you have paid anything or not. Best behavior rules! Period!

If we get to the site and a driver or roommate informs me that you have acted in such a way that they do not want you with them anymore, then it will be YOUR responsibility to find a ride for the rest of the trip as well as back to San Diego. This is one of those real-life instances where behavior and choices about behavior have consequences.

How Much to Contribute as a ride-or room sharer?

You should contribute at least as much as your proportionate share. So, for example, if there are two of you then you should share half; if there are three then you should each share 1/3 of the costs. And, as a thank you for the other car related costs you will *not* be sharing, you might at least pick up a lunch or dinner for the driver.

Taking Off on Your Own

Sometimes we will be in places where it is quite possible to wander off and to get hurt and have no one know that you need help or where to look for you if they did. So, if you are getting away from the main group, use the “buddy” system and go WITH someone. Even the most experienced

and skilled of outdoorsmen follow this rule because a number of highly trained people have formed the basis for countless stories because they thought they didn't need it and become legendary as lost or tragically hurt all the way to dead with no hope of rescue. And when you are off shooting keep track of each other and your whereabouts. Stay in touch and if you have not heard from them go check on them. And if you are the driver or the one who knows how to get in and out of the area, don't EVER leave someone without a VERY clear communication about it and a back-up plan.

So the rule is simple regarding taking off on your own: if you are alone... don't. But if a group or a couple of you want to explore some area away from the main group or where I am, that is fine so long as you keep safety uppermost in your mind and follow a couple of hard and fast rules.

Make sure to tell someone, including the instructor if possible, several critical bits of data:

- a. WHERE you are going,
- b. How and by what route you are going, and
- c. When you intend to return.
- d. Then, let us know when you *are* back!

No matter how much fun you are having or how great the picture ops are, plan on returning on time unless you are in radio or phone communication and call to tell me or your contact of the change in plans. If you do not do this, then if, after a reasonable "grace" period, you do not show up, we *will* be looking for you. We don't want to be too inflexible about this but if you are actually hurt or stuck somewhere you will not want us waiting too long before we start looking.

If we cannot find you on your stated route, we will call in help from the local authorities. So hear this and remember it: don't even *think* of having me spend all night looking for you only to find you back in the local pub or having the sheriff's search and rescue people find you alive and well but off on some ad hoc adventure. More and more rescue units are charging for their efforts especially when it is a wild goose chase set off by an inconsiderate or simply stupid person.

Behavior on Location

When we are on location, we are all representatives of San Diego City College and the Photo Program. People will

judge the college and our program by you and your actions. I want to be able to bring field trips and workshops to these places again so I will be quick to protect the relationships built up with these locations over past trips.

Therefore, when at a location with the class, act so as not to offend the locals or bring some ill will onto the rest of us or the program. If you do not, at the very least expect a grade impact for the misbehavior.

Protecting Equipment on Location

Unless you drop or knock something over, shooting in the studio is relatively safe for your equipment, But all manner of things can have a negative impact on it when on outdoor locations and you need to maintain and protect it as best as possible to make sure that when that incredible vista opens up before your eyes you and your equipment are ready for it

Here are several (but not ALL) of the important things to consider:

Batteries/Power

These days most things are electronic and run on batteries. Nothing is more frustrating than to run out of power in the middle of a wonderful scene. So carry both extra batteries and a charger. If you are staying in a motel/hotel, you can charge batteries at night. If you are camping, get an inverter for your car so you can charge them on the road.

Modern rechargeable batteries do not take a “set” like to older NiCads, so it is safe to “top” them up whenever you get a chance.

Moisture

Modern electronic gear including cameras and computers are really vulnerable to moisture. Both overt wetting from rain, snow, waterfall or ocean spray, etc. and also from condensation resulting from temperature changes will potentially damage them. So it is important to keep them dry.

If you have any potential of moisture make sure your equipment includes a rain cover of some sort for the camera and lens and that you use it. If some water splashes on your camera and/or lens, wipe it off as soon as possible.

Make sure to store your equipment in a dry place. I keep several large silicon pouches in my camera cases and bags to help in the fight against moisture.

Older non-electronic cameras also had a moisture-related problem that continues into the electronic era: rust. Rust never sleeps! The only protection is to keep the gear dry.

Dust

Dust can be as damaging to a camera as moisture. Hard grit from some environments can scratch shutter, lens coatings, mirrors, and wear out some close fitting parts of the system. And, in the digital age, getting dust on the sensor leads to truly ugly dark patches on your final image file.

Fortunately the same protection for moisture can also protect from dust. Rain covers also serve to protect your gear from a lot of the airborne particles. Unfortunately the moisture in the form of water drops is a lot larger than small dust particles and in the end, nothing eliminates all of the dust. So you will have to get serious about cleaning and keeping your camera cleaned as well as possible.

On several photo expeditions into dusty, sandy areas I've had to completely clean camera gear twice a day as a base and sometimes in between lunch and dinner cleanings as well.

Cold

Cold, per se, is not as big a problem for digital equipment as it is for mechanical equipment. Modern electronic shutters do not need the same lubricants the older mechanical ones did and so do not generally need the "winterizing" and then "summerizing" of cameras that was necessary for outdoor shooters of the past. But cold does bring on other problems that need to be dealt with.

For one thing, transferring cameras and equipment from warm to cold environments (and usually back again) will automatically create moisture condensation on them. The safest thing to do is keep your camera and lenses in Zip-Lock™ bags (or any sealable plastic bag) as it is transferred from the warm to the cold (or vice versa). This way the condensation will form on the outside of the bag and not so much on your camera or lens.

Cold also really impacts batteries and causes them to drain much faster than normal. If you are going into cold country carry extra batteries and try to keep batteries and battery powered things warm as much as possible. Keeping spare batteries inside your coat will help keep them charged at least until you put them in your camera out in the cold.

Loss

A really unfortunate side of any major photo trip is the potential of losing your gear either through theft or simply putting something down and in the fog of picture-making euphoria, walking off and leaving it. And, of course, something could break or get damaged leaving you without a camera or other critical parts of your system.

Professionals always carry redundant back-up equipment but that is an expensive solution. You also should have riders on your insurance to cover loss of equipment but that simply will repay you after the fact; you still are on a shoot without gear. So the best defense is a good offense and in this case it is in affirmative protective action on your part.

1. First, always have your equipment marked not only on the surface so it can be seen but also in places not so obvious but provide a means of identifying it in a pawn shop or after recovery by police. Also make a detailed inventory describing the pieces in your inventory to include serial numbers and photos. And in addition to photographing each item, photograph your loaded case to show it all is there.
2. Keep your gear close to you at all times and preferably connected to you with a strap or lanyard that is not easy to cut or simply fall apart when you snag it on a bush or tree limb. Don't walk away from your open camera case to take the shot, especially in a crowded place. But I've had a curious raven hijack lens caps and only because they tend not to be discrete and quiet did I stop them from taking more.
3. If you will be hiking then dropping stuff from your backpack or camera bag is always an issue. A friend of mine tied a length of day-glow colored twine to each piece. He said it made it very easy to spot if he laid it down and walked away or if he had something fall out of his bag on the trail.
4. Check your inventory often so you do not have to retrace too many steps to find something missing. In a camera case or pack with individual slots for everything it makes it easy to see if something is missing. Make and keep a checklist of your inventory available for frequent gear checks.

I know this may seem like a major pain but trust me on this,

it is far less a pain than to discover that camera body or lens is not in your case. And once you have made the basic inventory, all that is needed is to occasionally modify it as you get or replace pieces of equipment.

Weather Contingencies

There is one very predictable thing about being on location: things change; and they can change fast.

Especially in winter or during seasonal changes in Spring and Fall, the weather can go from warm and beautiful very fast. In mountainous country or in desert canyons you cannot see far into the direction of weather flow to anticipate oncoming issues. Sudden storms, blizzards, high winds, flash floods, etc. can overtake you with astonishing speed. Serious outdoor photographers quickly learn about weather and reading the skies for clues.

There are three major weather forecasting services and all are easily accessible on the web. **Intellicast, NOAA, and Weather.Com.** They are all pretty good but they gather their data from a different collection of sources. When I'm traveling into country where (or when) the weather can be changeable I check all three. Sometimes they do not agree with one another. In such cases I plan and equip for the range of weather from the best to worst forecasts and assume it will probably actually be wherever they share forecasts in common.

Here in San Diego, near the desert and the weather modifying influence of the ocean, we are so used to good weather we are not in the habit of thinking about it being dangerously cold or hot or, for example, of flash flooding. But virtually everywhere else in the country and world that is not the case. If you never stray from your car by the roadside it is hard to get into trouble (unless you are driving in conditions over your level of training and expertise), but if you get off the highway and into the bush then you really need to be prepared for anything that is likely to happen.

Here's a tip all survival experts agree on: you can go without food for weeks, water for a day or so (even in the desert for a day), but if your core temperature changes by only a few degrees you can die in a hurry. It is vital that you have clothing with you (not back in the car) that can keep you warm and dry. (No, you don't die from being wet, you die from the chilling effect of evaporation on your wet clothing especially if it is not wool or something that retains insulating value even when wet.) If you are really into outdoor shooting of the kind that takes you off the

pavement, then do yourself a favor, learn to survive in those environments. If you are lucky, that experience and training will serve only as a memory of an uncomfortable time, but when things go bad, that miserable training weekend or so will translate into your surviving. That is a good thing.

Safeguarding Yourself Lose-Proofing Yourself

There is no way in a few pages of this guideline document to teach you how to not get lost. But there are some things you can do for yourself that will help a lot.

1. Get and study a GOOD map of the area you are entering. Learn what to expect, what are the routes, what are the landmarks and other navigational clues.
2. Get, Carry, and Learn to Use a good compass or, better yet these days, a GPS device.
3. Despite our inner feelings to the contrary, studies have shown that even trained woodsmen, without utilizing external clues, cannot walk for long in a straight line. To help you stay on course, the compass or GPS will help but also learn to sight along landmarks. Pick two or three in the right line and keep them lines up. As you reach one, pick another further down the trail.
4. And as you reach each landmark, TURN AROUND and see what it looks like behind you. This is a major key to retracing your path because this is the view you will have as you try to get out and it often looks very different in the opposite direction.
5. If you are not really good at orienteering (and don't try to fool yourself here, your life may depend on this) carry more of that day-glow twine or even ribbon material and every so often tie a length to a branch. Make sure you can see the next piece from the last one when you turn around. As you come back be sure to retrieve these pieces and not leave them in the woods.
6. If you go too far and realize you cannot get back before dark, now your survival skills and clothing may be called on to keep you survivably warm through the night. Stumbling around in the dark with panic settling in is a nearly sure way to make certain you get lost and away from your back-trail of familiar views and twine trail markers.

Assuming you are prepared to weather the night you have a far better chance of getting out of this blunder alive if you stop, relax, accept the misery to come, and do not stray from the trail you can easily follow back in the morning.

I don't want to scare you away from the very places where some of the most wonderful photo images can be found. But I do want to have you take seriously any trek into the bush so that you will be able to come back and show us these astonishing images. The more you learn about land navigation and journeying through wilderness type areas, the more relaxed you will be and the more you can appreciate the beauty that is around you.

Wild Animals

For the most part, wild critters would far rather give humans a wide berth and, at least in the lower 48 are rarely a major threat, but by the same token there are a number of them quite capable of doing damage to any of us if we violate woods protocols or, for that matter, having us for lunch.

Take the time to research the local inhabitants of where ever you are headed. And learn the proper protocol for being around them on THEIR turf. Remember, Disney's wonderful cartoons aside, these cuddly looking animals are not tame and are not stuffed toys. Nearly all will react poorly if they sense danger whether or not that was your intention, and nearly all animal mothers are ferociously protective of their offspring. The speed, reflexes, and sheer strength of these creatures is far beyond most human abilities. For well over 50 yards a grizzly can outrun a race horse and decapitate a steer with a single blow. A black bear would normally prefer to run but in protecting cubs a female black bear can disassemble a human without working up a sweat. A mountain lion is faster and deadlier than a man by several orders of magnitude. And an enraged badger, no bigger than a medium sized dog (they seem to be born enraged and then get really angry as they age), can leave you with insufficient time to close your eyes in a few seconds. A rattlesnake can strike so quickly it takes a high speed camera to capture it.

As humans have encroached on the animals' territory and then compounded that by feeding them, many have lost their natural fear and antipathy toward us two-legged varmints. To a large mountain lion the word child translates into cougarese as "lunch." In fact, if the cat is hungry, adults

may come to seem like soft targets (no pun intended...).

So find out what is out there and prepare to leave it alone and photograph it from afar. Do not try to make friends or pet the oh-so-cute cubs or other young. Make yourself known and if you encounter a larger cat obviously looking for a snack, make yourself appear as big and ferocious as possible. You want to make yourself look like anything EXCEPT an easy lunch.

Again, researching such things may seem to be a pain but it can have several levels of reward. For one, the more you know about the inhabitants where you are going the richer your experience will be as you see signs of them. But also, learning how to avoid trouble or diffuse it can have a major and positive effect on your ability to show your photos to anyone. So believe me, you are not faster, stronger, deadlier by yourself than the creatures out there. The good news is that if you learn and obey some basic rules you do not have to be.

Injury/First Aid

Like some of these other topics, this one needs to be learned in far greater detail than a simple document like this can cover. But it is nevertheless important, especially if you will be going very far off of the pavement and away from your vehicle.

We have grown incredibly soft with our modern lifestyle. We can cut ourselves and because of handy clean water at the tap can clean it up, squeeze on some antibacterial or antiseptic ointment, pop on a bandage, and by keeping it clean simply let it heal. But if you are going to be in the woods for a few days and cut yourself, without the ability to treat it on the spot you risk the chance of serious infection that, by the time you get back to civilization, can become a major health threat. Bad things cascade on you when you are in trouble in the wild places. And once your mind panics your chances for survival diminish rapidly.

So in your camera pack carry a small but stocked first aid kit; learn how to *properly* use it, then keep it freshly stocked and at the ready.

But what if you are really hurt; not a splinter or small cut but maybe a broken bone or worse? This is where you and your 'buddy' have a serious decision to make and it can only be validly made based on your combined levels of experience and skill.

We will discuss this more in class but the bottom line is, now that buddy that is with you may be your lifeline. Without him or her, if you are hurt so severely that you cannot get back to the car without risking further injury, you are in trouble. So the message is clear: do not go off into serious terrain by yourself.

Taking Care of Your Vehicle

The odds are good that you will get to and from the shoot, or at least to and from the trailhead, with a vehicle of some kind. One of the worst experiences you can have – not necessarily deadly but certainly irritating and a major downer – is to experience car trouble. From simple flats to getting stuck to having serious mechanical trouble, nothing short of serious injury can spoil a trip faster than car trouble.

The simplest way to deal with it is through prevention: making as sure as possible it doesn't happen in the first place, especially if you are alone and without help or means of getting help. Make sure your car is in very good condition. If it is near time get the oil changed and the chassis lubed, fresh filters for air, fuel, oil. Make sure your tires (including spare) are up to the trip in terms of both tread life and tread STYLE. If it is close to time for a tune-up do it before you go. Check and make sure you know how to use any auto equipment such as air pumps, tire chains, sand ladders, etc. before you pull out of your driveway and head out.

Carry a credit card or secret some cash away for emergencies and LEAVE IT FOR EMERGENCIES not for the neat trinket you want at that great little roadside stand.

Top up the tank whenever you get down to below half and certainly before you head into desolate country. Even if it seems you might only need to drive a few miles, do so on a full tank of fuel.

When you walk away from the car make sure the lights are off and the doors are closed or the door lights are turned off. Coming back to a vehicle with a dead battery can be more than a nuisance...

In rough country the buddy system for vehicles is also called for. Get and use a CB radio or Family Service Radio to stay in touch. With the extra vehicle handy, should you get yours stuck or out of commission you have a way to get yourself out and possible to extricate the vehicle too.

We'll cover some of this in more detail in class or at least point out the resources for further research. If you are lucky

or careful (or both) you may have a lifetime of wonderful landscape photography in the beautiful and remote areas of the country and world and never have cause to worry about any of it. But all it takes is one slip up to turn all that luck into a tragic story in the local paper. Those slip-ups generally come from the overconfident or under-prepared who had no intention of going on an adventure. They merely stepped into the woods for a photo, then saw another a little deeper... then another. Suddenly (it seemed) they were completely turned around and lost. Or hurt. The tragedy is that it is nearly always avoidable with even a minimum of proper preparedness.

Photo trips can be wonderful experiences and chances to explore new places and take magical photographs. Landscape photography has a settled place in stock and other outlets in addition to the more typical display prints, so there is the real potential of turning this fun time into a revenue stream. Learning about that is the purpose of the class.

And, class field trips are usually fun learning experiences with the added bonus of returning with some exciting new images. But the fun goes away quickly if you get hurt, or if someone's rude behavior interferes with others' enjoyment. When class is over you can return anytime on your own and do as you think best. But to make the class enjoyable for everyone, these guidelines are presented and will be followed.

-NDK-