

## Funny Thing, Goals

Wednesday, 27 June 2007

It's a funny thing that happens when you start writing things down. Some years ago, maybe more than 7 or 8 years now, I planned a hiking/camping trip to the Grand Canyon with my best friend. Though the trip was harrowing, we were glad we did it, and I don't know about him, but I learned a lot about myself because of it. Soon afterward, I wrote on a previous web site of mine that I would visit every single National Park there was, and later on, I added photographing the parks to that initial quest. Thanks to my wife, I'm getting steadily along toward reaching that goal.

Perhaps it won't be as quickly as I'd imagined it, but we certainly are making good progress. It's because of two things: my wife and I decided early in our relationship that we would not wait around to see the world; and secondly, she has a tenacity and brilliance that makes me glad to be with her, because she's pulling me right along to fulfill that promise.

Every time she plans a vacation (she plans all the family vacations), she tries to see where we can go that I might be able to visit a National Park. Even if we're going to be flying into a city like San Diego, she makes sure that I get my shooting time, so when we did go to San Diego, I got to go see Joshua Tree. Though the schedule is sometimes a little wacky, and getting into the mood doesn't happen until some days before the vacation, or we're well on our way to the airport (for me anyway), factor in the kids and dragging around all the luggage and my own photo equipment ... well, you get the picture. It's not easy. But more than anything else, she has been my task master and the one who facilitates my photography of the National Parks.

We also do visit other places, even foreign countries like the UK, Italy, Malta, Baja and more, but the one overall goal in my mind has been the National Parks of the United States. And within the last few years, I decided that since I'm going to all the National Parks, I would also help fund the needs of the Parks system by getting a new Parks Pass each year. Just \$50 per year, it's a great investment for me since I'm sure to get much more out of it than just the pictures. No one will ever see all the little things I see which I never photograph. And I'm lately getting to the point of wanting to give even more now that I can finally afford to "give money away" so to speak (I mean to charity).

It's hard photographing in the Parks for a number of reasons. First, there are the crowds. Second, sometimes it's very hard to get lodging inside or near the Parks, so the golden hours of photography are elusive (sunrise or sunset) because you can't be there in time for "the shot", all the time. Third, there's much scouting and research that one should do beforehand, but that doesn't always help if your time in the park is short. Honestly, 3 or 4 days of vacation time, is just not enough to "get" the whole park.

If I had my druthers, I would spend at least 6 weeks at a time in a park to really discover all the little places that you don't get time for on a family vacation. To walk all the trails that can't be walked because you don't have time to camp next to the lake when you get there. So I made another goal, as life went on. Actually, it's been a very recent goal. And my wife spurred this one on too. When we are able to (whether we're rich at some point, or at retirement) we'll buy or lease a mobile home. We'll rent out the house (whichever house we're living in at the time). And we'll travel the United States, stopping at every National Park there is, so I can photograph there for 6 weeks at a time. How wonderful would that be?

Some time last year, I bought a picture book of the National Parks which was on sale at Barnes & Noble. It happens to be a great "mile marker" for what I've seen, and where we might plan for the next time. There are over 390 areas under protection as a National Park, Monument, or Historic Site, but not all are designated as National Park. How many places have I been to? Let me see, now:

- Acadia
- Arches
- Bryce Canyon
- Canyon de Chelly
- Canyonlands
- Capitol Reef

- Casa Grande
- Everglades
- Fire Island Nat'l Seashore
- Grand Canyon
- Grand Tetons
- Joshua Tree
- Saguaro
- Mount Rainier
- White Sands
- Yellowstone
- Zion

The list above is only that of the "natural" places. I don't count some monuments that I've visited, like the Statue of Liberty, or smaller areas like Gateway National Recreation Area which is minutes from my home. It's not that these sites are not important, they are. But my vision of the National Parks is something of wilderness, something that is not easily attained. If you haven't ever been to one, and don't know the feeling of being stunned by beauty of the natural landscape, I cannot really make you understand.

Perhaps that is why I photograph these places.

Next week, we'll be headed off to Colorado and the Rocky Mountain National Park, otherwise called Estes Park. Perhaps we may see other natural areas while we're there, but the trip is specifically to see RMNP. Perhaps I'll post photos and the travelogue beginning with this trip, and work my way backward.

There's a lot to post.