

It does not take long for anyone involved with AWA to appreciate how important volunteers are to our organization's accomplishments. This section on photography (not to mention this issue's cover photo by Derald Lobay and last year's June cover photo and article by Ray Rasmussen) could not have been compiled without the generous contributions members of Images Alberta Camera Club made to AWA (see the club's website www.imagesalberta.ca).

Muffy Mathewson was the inspiration behind a 2009 photography project in Lakeland. Muffy, Shirley Coulson, and Gerry Wirun spent many hours in different seasons photographing there. The result of Muffy's inspiration is an impressive photographic record of Lakeland's marvelous natural assets. AWA's Carolyn Campbell has been using those magnificent visual representations of the area in her efforts to champion the need for increased protection there.

There is no doubt those images are a valuable asset in that campaign. Some photography suggestions from Gerry and Shirley are found later in this section.

The section begins with a piece by Fred Rushworth, the editor of the Images Alberta newsletter. Fred generously offered to write a piece about the Waterton Wildflower Festival for this issue of the *Advocate*. Please enjoy what follows.

- Ian Urquhart



PHOTOGRAPHY TECHNIQUE AND THE WATERTON WILDFLOWER FESTIVAL

By Fred Rushworth

The Waterton Wildflower Festival is a nine-day event covering two weekends and the weekdays between. Waterton National Park is a natural and superb location for this event as the Park lays claim to having over 50 rare Alberta wildflowers species within its boundaries. Waterton offers a

mix of microclimates as the mountains explode from the prairies and reach for the sky offering visitors a chance to see everything from marsh marigolds and bog orchids at lower elevations to alpine poppies.

The Waterton Wildflower Festival is now in its 7th year and runs from

June 19th to 27th this year. The festival attracts visitors from across the world to its workshops, hikes, and talks. Each year an artist runs an in-depth painting or drawing workshop. No fewer than four different photographers run field sessions ranging from three hours to two days in length. Naturalists and



Spotted saxifrage PHOTO: F. RUSHWORTH

conservationists lead interpretive strolls, hikes, and horseback rides exploring Waterton's wildflowers.

My wife and I went to Waterton last summer to attend a two-day photography workshop led by professional photographer, Paul Gilbert. Over the course of two days we toured the park and were introduced to the wildflowers of the region as we learned about photographic composition and technique.

Paul's teaching style was very relaxed. We started each day with a half hour discussion on topics like design elements, lighting, and the challenges of close-up or macro photography. He often illustrated these topics with his own photographs from his book *WILD COLOURS: Canada's Rocky Mountain Wildflowers*, which he co-authored with Katherine Graham. Those discussions continued in the field with some hands-on advice as we photographed: shoot from a low angle and slightly uphill to make a small patch of flowers appear to extend to the horizon, look at the strong lines and swirl on the leaves of the false hellebore, or since red flowers will always override other colours to attract the viewer's eye make them the focal point in a field of assorted flowers. We learned how to soften harsh direct light by using a unique, collapsible and very packable diffuser and conversely how to use a small reflector to 'throw' a little light into deeply shaded areas.

We traveled the Old Chief highway towards the U.S. border stalking the sparrow's egg lady slipper, a striking white orchid like the yellow lady slipper that I often find in boggy areas on

my hikes around Edmonton. Further down the road, we came across a red fox crossing a field of glacier lilies. The fox quickly departed and we then spent the better part of an hour creating photographs of flowers amongst the weathered textures of some old wind-felled trees and close ups of petal and stamen details. We also worked at creating leading lines – visual elements in a photo that draw the viewer's eye to the main subject. Tripods were essential as any camera movement is exaggerated when working on close up shots.

Photographing wildflowers demands that we be especially aware of our personal footprints on the landscape. A group of eight or ten photographers could leave a path of devastation on delicate ecosystems so we worked from trail side and followed established paths or stepping points to avoid damaging other plants as we searched for the desired viewpoint.

A trip up the Red Rock canyon road took us to rolling subalpine meadows that were still early in their blooms of sticky geraniums, wild strawberries and Mariposa lilies. As most of us were preoccupied with trying to capture the fine hairs that protect the petals of the Mariposa lily we were suddenly brought up from our viewfinders as someone caught sight of a lone black bear about 500 metres behind us. The bruin was making its way across the meadow towards the river quite unconcerned about our presence. In rolling meadows above the Blakiston valley we switched our photographic style from detailed close ups and floral portraits to use instead the

wildflowers as a foreground for scenic landscapes featuring the mountains in the background.

On our second day, we travelled down the Cameron Lake road past the relics of Waterton's short-lived oil days of the early 1900s and on to the Lineham Ridge trail. The trail starts with a meander through a mixed forest and then, grade-by-grade, makes its diagonal climb towards the alpine meadows. We stopped along the way having discovered Oregon grape growing in an opening of the wooded slopes. Paintbrush, purple clematis and columbine abounded amid windfalls, watercourses and slide zones. Further up the sun emerged as we entered the meadow above the trees. Here we pulled out Paul's diffuser and took turns holding it above photographers contorted in yoga-like poses above shooting stars. A few added polarizing or neutral density filters to their cameras to reduce the light entering their cameras and let them shoot at slower shutter speeds. This technique created a soft milky flow to the small streams surrounded by vibrant flowers.

In the afternoon, we returned to the Waterton town site and the Lower Bertha Falls trail. This was a much gentler trail to walk. Here we often had to deal with lower light in the shade of the deciduous trees. We dealt with that situation by using slower shutter speeds and larger aperture settings to allow more light into the camera. Those with a digital camera also could change to a higher ISO setting. I found that ISO 400 was as high as my camera would let me shoot without creating too much graininess in my images. The low light also required us



Three-flowered avens PHOTO: F. RUSHWORTH

to use our tripods as much as possible to avoid camera shake. Sometimes though the terrain would not cooperate and we could not set a tripod where we wanted it – then we simply rested the camera on

a bag or jacket. We found that either the timer feature or a remote shutter release on the camera avoided camera shake as we took our photos at those longer exposures. When the breeze was an issue we often created a wind block with a bag or a jacket to prevent any wind induced motion.

At the end of the two days we had learned many valuable lessons we have continued to use as photographers and hikers. We gained an understanding of the flowers, how to identify them, and where to look for them.

We had gone to Waterton for a weekend with indefinite plans for the next two weeks. In the end we stayed a full two weeks practicing the techniques we had learned and expanding our knowledge of Waterton's wildflowers. We watched fields where flowers had been just opening come into full

bloom. We hiked the trails and saw the progression of flowers that had been in full bloom in the valleys appear in bud and then bloom at higher elevations.

The Waterton Wildflower Festival offers a great series of talks, interpretive walks and hikes, and workshops for both the novice and experienced photographer. It is well worth a visit. If you would like more information about the Festival and its program schedule please visit their website:

www.watertonwildflowers.com 🍷

- Fred Rushworth is an Edmonton based photographer with a story to tell who edits the newsletter of Edmonton's Images Alberta Camera Club. He often shares his photos and their background as he explores the world of photography and writing through his blog skinnyskierpress.blogspot.com.