

## Stop And Smell The Flowers

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We all enjoy getting away to a new place we have never been to, or an old favor place we return to time and time again. I had two wonderful photo trips this fall. The last week of September, I went to a new location, Colorado, and the middle two weeks of October, I drove nearly 3000 miles all around and old favor location, Arizona and New Mexico. The aspens were at peak color in Aspen, Crested Butte and the San Juan Mountains of Colorado. The American South West I believe is my spirit's birthplace. Each time I return to the desert, I have a feeling of coming home. The warm temperatures, the dry humidity, the warm colors of the earth and sun, it is all as familiar to me as the A, B, C's.

It was no wonder that I had an experience that can only be described as heavenly. As my trip partner, Kent Crossley and I were visiting site after site, there was one place that was constantly in the back of my mind. This trip's pinnacle for me was going to be Canyon De Chelly in the Navaho Nation. It was the sight of one of my favorite Ansel Adams images, "White House Ruins". But oddly enough, it wasn't there were I had my experience. It was a place called "Mummy Cave". The Navaho guide pointed the way as I drove through some tough 4x4 trails, but as we arrived, the drama of the drive dissipated. We naturally jumped out and immediately started to scope out the angles for the best compositions. However, after 15-20 minutes of shooting I suddenly was hit by the nature of the environment we were in. Mummy Cave is at the end of a box canyon; therefore, as you look all around, 800-900 foot sheer rock walls surround you. Then, for the second time in my life, I felt an overwhelming feeling of calm and tranquility. The silence was defying. Not a man-made sound at all, no jets overhead, no sirens, and no natural sounds either, no wind, no birds calling. I stopped photographing and just looked at what was before me. A land so ancient, that human measure of time is inconceivable. Beauty that is beyond the imagination. And that feeling of calm and serenity. I didn't care about anything else in the world at that moment. Hell, I didn't even care about taking photographs. Now that has to be a powerful overwhelming feeling. I just stood there looking. Looking at where I was, at what was in front of my eyes, and what was inside of me, the feelings in my heart and in my minds ability to comprehend. How could all things come together to create such a place of beauty and peace. What a natural work of magnificence. But alas, as with all good things, it must end. I'm not sure how long I was in that trance, but it was long enough to make me change some of the ways I had been thinking about photography and life too.

So, I hope that in your travels to your favorite places or a new place, you "stop and smell the flowers". There is a lot more than just taking a photograph, become one with the environment and relate to the animals that are in your presence. If you fully experience the land, you images will convey the feelings and emotions you have as you create your photographic interpretations. Those feeling will then be emitted from your images to the viewers, and they too will experience what you did and thus the magic will continue on, and on, from photographer to viewer, to viewer. A never-ending chain of experience and emotion spanning time and place.