

Picture this:

Get the most out of your photos



By Josh "Gesh" Meier

One common question debated in online hiking forums is whether carrying a camera is worth the extra weight, especially during long-distance hikes.

Absolutely! Unless you're a fanatical ultra-light enthusiast, the weight is insignificant. I know it all adds up, but it's worth it to capture memories that will last a lifetime.

Unless you have professional aspirations, you really don't need to carry a full-sized camera with multiple lenses. Advancements in technology make today's pocket-sized, point-and-shoot cameras capable of taking some really nice photos, and without the weight or bulk. Compact system cameras further bridge the gap, offering the versatility of interchangeable lenses in a smaller parcel.

And let's not forget smartphones. While the place of phones on the trail is a longstanding debate of its own, it's hard to argue against their potential. Any means of carrying maps, water reports, communications, music, photo options and more in a sleek 4-ounce package probably deserves some credibility in a community that relishes multipurpose gear. *[Editor's note: Phone pictures are rarely of the quality needed for large-print formats, such as this magazine.]*

The real consideration is whether photography can enhance your experience. The most obvious benefit is in the preservation of memories. As many of us know, time on the trail can produce some rewarding life experiences. The well-timed click of a shutter can leave you with a visual memento to complement your reflections.

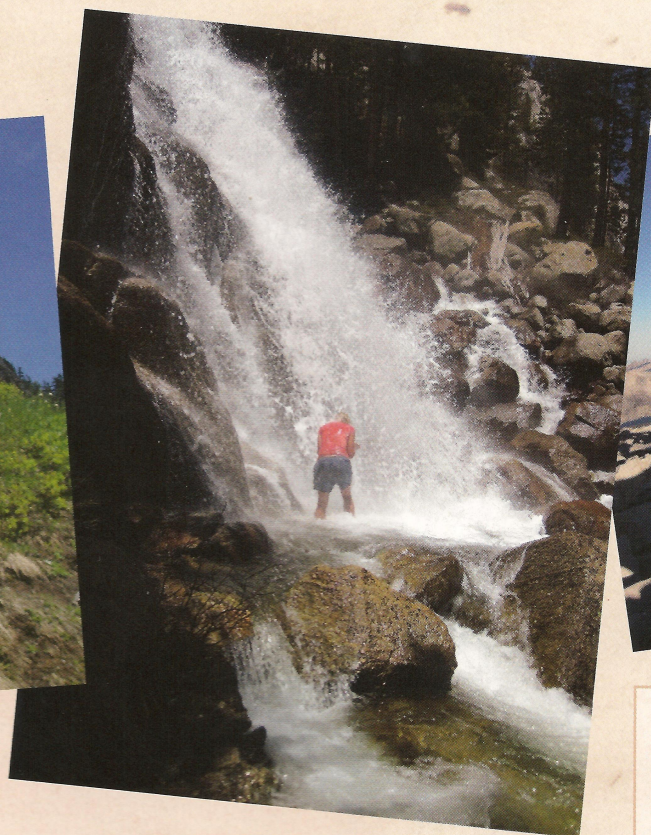
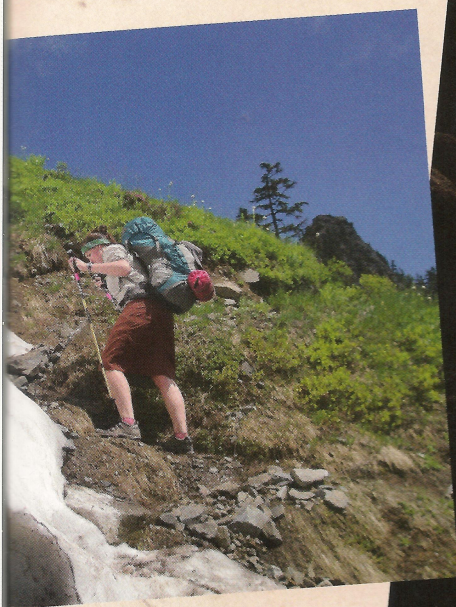
Furthermore, photography is a means by which we can share what we've seen with others. As hikers, we are very fortunate to travel to places and take in sights many will never encounter. With its power to inspire, a photograph can convince people of the need to preserve our wild spaces, and perhaps encourage them to set out on adventures of their own.

Personally, I believe one of the greatest assets of photography is the opportunity it offers to immerse yourself in your surroundings. Too often, especially as thru-hikers, we get caught up in mileage. Unintentionally, we place destination over journey. Photography can help you to get the most out of your experience by forcing you to take the time to stop and look around. It allows for a pause to tune in to the ambiance of the trail. The physical achievement of a completed hike is compelling, but for me, the true reward is found in those moments of wonder that allow us to appreciate where we are.

With that in mind, here are a few simple photo tips for your next backcountry excursion.

The Practical:

Always Keep Your Camera Handy: You never know what's around the corner, and you won't have time to dig through your pack when the sun breaks just right or a sasquatch peeks out from behind a tree. Carry your camera in a front pocket, or buy an inexpensive pouch and attach it to your hip belt. Use a small zipper plastic bag to protect it from the elements.



From left to right: *Taking Advantage of Complimentary Light*, photo by Aaron Doss. *Shoot from Different Perspectives*, photo by Josh Meier. *Catch Hikers Being Hikers*, photo by Jim Lesassier. *Catch Hikers Being Hikers*, photo by Krystal Rogers.

Conserve Power: Unless you carry a solar charger, electronic devices and extended spells in the wilderness don't mix. Save juice by resisting the temptation to repeatedly scan through your images. Do the bulk of your deleting in town. The cold will also zap your battery, so keep electronics warm by sleeping with them. The photo op of a lifetime always comes moments after your battery dies.

Increase Capacity: I always carry a spare battery and extra memory cards. Even though you can get cards that hold thousands of pictures (I recommend setting your camera to the highest image quality, by the way) it's always good to have a backup in case something goes wrong. I once lost my camera on the trail and ended up backtracking several miles in a desperate search. I ended up finding the camera dry and safe a few miles back. However, those moments before I found it were wrought with heartbreak. It wasn't really the camera I cared about. It was the fact that the memory card held nearly three weeks' worth of cherished photos. I now make it a point to switch cards with more frequency, tucking the full ones securely in my pack.

Optimize Town Stops: If your hike includes town resupply, take the opportunity to address photo needs for the stretch ahead. Charge your batteries. You can carry or bounce your charger, but be sure it's available at every stop. Review your photos and delete the unwanted. It's also a good idea to back up your images as often as you can. There are many online photo-hosting websites. If you don't have computer or Internet access, take advantage of drug-store photo kiosks. Simply have your images saved to a disc, mail it home, and be on your way.

Technique:

Take Advantage of Complimentary Light: Often, the best photo ops come during the "magic hour" – the period of soft light that

occurs around sunrise or sunset. With the sun closer to the horizon, light travels farther through the atmosphere and decreases in intensity, creating dramatic shadows and casting the landscape in a golden glow. Clouds also can have a filtering effect, so pay close attention to them, especially when the sun emerges as bad weather breaks.

Shoot from Different Perspectives: Capture the true essence of a moment by shooting from different angles to punctuate the setting. Don't be afraid to experiment. Try shots while kneeling, use vertical and horizontal compositions, and look through vegetation. The possibilities are endless. Unique vantages will make your photos more interesting.

Catch Hikers Being Hikers: Cowboy camping, stream crossings, hitchhiking, and definitely town stops; hikers march to the beat of their own drum. Though we might not be quick to notice, we often exhibit behavior or find ourselves in scenarios that would seem downright bizarre to the general public. Have the awareness to step outside of your hiker mindset from time to time, recognize those out of the ordinary moments, and click away.

Tell the Whole Story: Those pretty sunsets and mountain vistas are great, but don't limit your photos to scenery. Some of the most noteworthy experiences can happen during resupply trips or through the antics of other hikers. Take a journalistic approach and capture the entire story.

Hopefully this advice will prove helpful. Just remember to enjoy every moment of your journey, and take plenty of photos along the way! 📸