

Expeditions II

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The Olympic Quest

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TRUE STORY...

Whew! This was an awesome weekend. The Quinault Lodge was very nice except for the 1920's bath tub. Friday I spent photographing waterfalls and driving around the lake just checking things out. The weather could not have been better. Blue sky and sunny all three days. I video taped and photographed Graves Creek Falls on Friday.

That night I had an incredible seafood dinner with a glass of merlot while watching Eagles fly around the shoreline out the window I was sitting next to. Saturday morning I sacrificed breakfast to hit the road early. I arrived at the Hoh Rain Forest around 9am. Check with the Ranger then headed out on the trails to shoot as many photos as humanly possible. Little did I know how lucky I would get along the Hoh River Trail.

When I asked the Ranger which trail to hike to film animals he said "you'll want to hike the Hoh River Trail it's 18 miles all the way to the Blue Glaciers of Mt. Olympus, you'll get more then you bargained for". I wasn't sure exactly how to take what he said but with excitement and vigor I set out.

Less then 100 feet from my car I could see along the "concrete path for lamesters" there were Elk tracks in the mud. "Man if only I had been here earlier I said to myself", I found the spur to the Hoh River Trail. Once there you go left. If I had the time and gear I could hike all the way up to the Blue Glacier and Mt. Olympus for 18 miles one way. Some day I'll have to do just that.

I must have hiked for another 5 maybe 10 minutes and I noticed off in the bush to my right what looked like one of those stupid fake animals people put in their yards or along side the roads and, I thought to myself "ah man! they put a fake Elk out here? how lame is that".

Maybe 10 seconds went by then it moved it's head. Recovering from a slight state of shock I couldn't believe my eyes. I was actually seeing an Elk live and in person for the first time in the wild. I walked slowly but forward to get closer along the trail. There were two of them off to my right in the bush.

As I continued further along the trail it kept checking me out and moving closer to the trail and me. I quickly attached my lens and set it on the tripod. As soon as I got the camera ready I was shooting and I didn't stop until I had to change film. "Oh yes", I said to myself click...yes....click...thats the stuff...click. Well you get the idea.

I had been shooting for maybe 20 minutes when I heard some people coming. "Great, just what I need" I thought to myself. "A bunch of clueless yeahoo digiheads are going to scare the Elk away and ruin my shots". I kept shooting. When the hikers got close enough to my position I could hear sort of what they were saying but I couldn't make it out. Because they were French.

"PERFECT" I thought to myself. They were so loud I had to tell them to be quiet. I really wanted to tell them off but I knew I couldn't. They approached my position very slowly. I could tell from there reaction to the now 5 fully grown Elk all around me they were new to being in the wild with animals.

So I signaled to them to keep coming by waving my hand toward me.

"Freakin amateurs", "these guys were way out of their league" I thought to myself. Once they met up with me "reluctantly as they were" I told them it's ok they'll let you get within about 15 feet. They don't mind they're used to us being out here.

After they shot off a few lame point and shoot digital photos I changed my position to a few feet to the right along the trail but closer to the big male Elk to get an even better shot. Keep in mind these Elk are literally only 10 to 15 feet or so away from us. I started firing off another round of "Professional photos" when one of the Frenchman decided he would get close to the big male Elk to get a better photo.

That's when I noticed he was getting too close. By now the Frenchman was 10 feet, 8 feet, 6 feet away from a full grown male Elk. By now the Elk is having an issue with this and was giving the Frenchman a hard look. This of course did not deter the Frenchman at all. "Big surprise".

Now I was getting worried that we are going to have a serious situation here so I told him to backoff. He didn't understand me. I said it twice and nothing. "a few expletives by me", then I told his friend to tell him to backoff right now. His friend started speaking to the man in French to backoff as I was also adding my English version "backoff, backoff", suddenly the Elk turned toward him huffing and puffing and stomping the ground toward the Frenchman. The sound of their hooves is loud cause they're so big and heavy. HERE IS THE BEST PART...

This scared the crap out of the Frenchman so bad he backed away rapidly while yelling "saclablew" or something in French while his friend was just as scared and telling him to get back in French. The man was "very very" lucky the Elk didn't hit him or he would have been seriously injured.

I of course was trying very hard not to laugh my "...ss" off. Thinking to myself "that just made my weekend"!

As I started to setup my next series of shots I told the now gasping for air Frenchman "wait until they cross the trail to the other side before you continue", "We...We" he said. "That's a big deer his friend said in English" "That's Elk not deer" I said thinking to myself. Shaking my head I started walking more toward the other Elks to keep taking more photos.

"Weeeee we're havin fun now" I thought to myself. Well long story short there were lots of backcountry hikers with full packs that passed me and other hikers. The rest of this trail was pretty uneventful. Later that day I hiked and photographed the "Shadow of Moss" trail or something.

On my way back to Lake Quinault I stopped at this privately owned place to eat. It's called "The Hard Rain Cafe". I was very hungry and the bacon cheese burger that man made for me was without a doubt the best I've ever had.

This guy had a beard and was pudgy and very funny. When I walked in he said "howdy" with a grin. I thought I was in hickville. He was very nice. Asked me what I wanted and I said I'd like a bacon cheeseburger. With a grin he said "comin right up, folks just love the cheeseburgers", while I was waiting to eat the burger I sat out on the patio next to Sasquatch and setup my camera for a self portrait. He said everyone loves Sasquatch.

The cheeseburger was incredible. If he and his wife don't sell the place and leave I will definitely go back for another burger. If only Seattle had such a place.

I drove back to the lodge and hiked a short loop trail to kill time while waiting for my dinner time.

You have to make a reservation to eat a meal in this place. Breakfast is the only exception. So I hiked the loop trail which had lots of Trillium flowers and three waterfalls.

One of which I really liked. In fact I liked it so much I photographed it and video taped it. OMG it's like a miniature version of Proxy Falls in OR. Absolutely gorgeous waterfall called Falls Creek Falls. Dave Lister of (Cascade Studios) & I will use it on X2 when he gets around to producing it. The cascading water over deep green moss and dark green moss covered rocks all around was awesome.

I ate a late dinner Saturday around 8pm and was very tired. I drank a glass of merlot with dinner and another afterward while sitting in front of the fireplace in the lobby. I almost couldn't walk. "Either that wine was very strong or I don't hold my liquor very well", I thought to myself. I went to bed and was out.

Sunday the final day and little did I know how much of a payoff I was in store for. Just when I thought my trip was already peaking. I slept in a bit and ate a really good breakfast then checked out of the Lake Quinault Lodge.

I hiked up that loop trail one last time to shoot that waterfall then got into my car and headed North to Neah Bay and Cape Flattery. What an incredible experience this turned out to be. I drove along the Northshore road to the fields where Elk and bear have been known to graze in hopes that I would get lucky. Man did I ever get lucky.

I made it to the fields and noticed as I drove up there were several cars already parked along the side of the road with doors open and someone standing in the field to my right with a camera on a tripod. I got very excited wondering what could that be when suddenly as I looked I saw a huge Black Bear around 100 feet from this guy.

I practically slammed on my breaks. Stopped the car, turned it off and grabbed all my gear, jumped out of the car scrambling to get everything set on the camera. I ran out into the field and setup my tripod with zoom lens and remote and started shooting. After only two photos I ran out of film.

Suddenly to my horror I forgot to bring more film from the car. Now I had to run back to the car and get more film then run back to the tripod and camera still standing out there. What a sight this must have been for the people sitting in their cars with the windows rolled down watching. After I got back to my tripod cursing the whole time for being so stupid.

I rapidly began changing film. I must have set a new World Land "Speed Film" loading record. I stomped the ground and cursed which of course only got the bears attention. My shutter didn't stop. I shot almost an entire roll of 36 on just this one animal. I was so excited to be this close to a wild bear.

Palms sweating and heart pounding. Not because of the excitement but because I moved up too fast and too close to the bear. He didn't like this and started walking toward me with a stare I'll not care to see again. "Alright, Alright I get it", I said outloud to myself as I backed up making sure not to run.

Good Times! Soon the bear headed into the trees and I grabbed my gear and headed out to Hwy 101 to go North.

The drive up to Neah Bay was beautiful next to the water most of the way. Not much to see at Neah Bay except for coffee shops and a few greasy spoons. The Neah Cafe makes a KILLER bacon cheese burger! Wasn't hungry for 9 hours after eating it. I drove up to Cape Flattery trailhead.

For those who haven't been here this is important. The road to the trailhead is 5 miles of dirt rock road. When you get to the trailhead you'll see a road ending just ahead of you with other cars and another going to your Right. The road to your Right takes you way way up to the top of the island. Do this ONLY after you've hiked the Cape Flattery Trail out to the Ocean. That way you top off the experience with an incredible view.

The trail to the Ocean is only about 1/4 mile and it's all down hill. There are many spots to shoot photography. Man I gotta tell ya this place is a photographers paradise! Huge and I mean HUGE Sea stack rocks with trees and moss getting pummelled by crashing waves is a site to behold.

I shot 2 1/2 rolls of slide film here. Seagulls and Eagles flying around everywhere. After photographing the first spot I walked to the very end of the trail. It ends with a nice wooden platform overlooking the Ocean. Be careful during strong winds if you decide to walk around the platform to the very edge. The dropoff is hundreds of feet down.

This is the most North Western spot you can stand in North America. There are huge caves with water crashing into them. They were created over hundreds of years. There is a sign on the platform that says the ground beneath you is slowly eroding from the power of the water.

"GREAT", I thought to myself. That makes me feel soooooo much better. I shot the most incredible photos of the Island just off the pier in front of me that is surrounded completely by water. Waves crashing on it's shores and the Seastacks around it. The sound of the waves at this nice wooden pier is very loud but very cool.

There is a light house and a couple of buildings there. I got the island with the lighthouse, a fishing boat passing in front of it with a huge swarm of Seagulls right behind it following the boat while, waves crashed upon the Island all the same frame.

I also photographed a mother Sealion and her baby floating in the water below. Not sure how good that one will look. I got only one shot of an Eagle passing overhead. After I was finished at the Cape Flattery Trail. I drove up to the top of this area and was treated to an incredible view.

I could look down on the Island with the Lighthouse and could see some of Canada just across the way and some of the Canadian Rockies. Yes I shot photos of this too.

My god how lucky was I on this trip. What an incredible weekend. I'll remember it for a long time . Well until then. Happy reading everyone.