



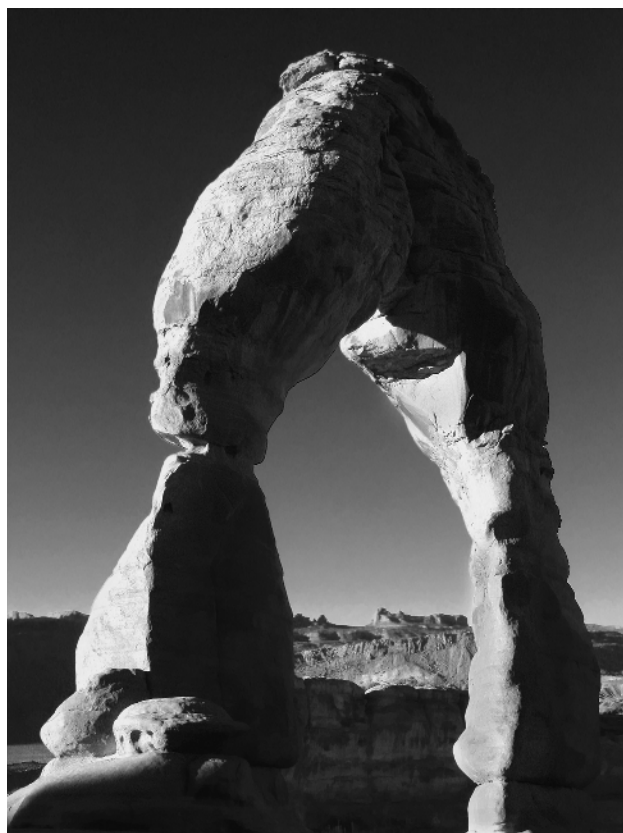
Chapter 1

AN APPROACH TO PHOTOSHOP



Photoshop was once very intimidating to the nature photography community. It seemed to do things inappropriate to the goals of a nature photographer. Most photographers no longer feel that way today because the use of Photoshop has evolved beyond tricks and clever manipulations; however, a lot of information on using Photoshop has not. The nature photographer needs an approach to Photoshop that honors the traditions and needs of nature photography.

I learned nature photography during my teenage and college years, working in black and white. The photograph in figure 1-1 of Delicate Arch in Arches National Park is similar to such work. At that time, color was considered just for those who could not deal with the art of black and white or for those who had to shoot it for professional reasons. So, I spent a great deal of time in the darkroom, as did most serious photographers, both pros and amateurs. Most of us revered the old black-and-white masters



1-1

such as Ansel Adams, W. Eugene Smith, Bill Brandt, and Andreas Feininger. We spent a great deal of time in the darkroom perfecting our craft and trying to make our photographs sing, as Adams once put it. A lot of what Photoshop offers actually comes from the traditional black-and-white darkroom way of working on an image.

Through the 1980s, color became the dominant way of photography. The traditional darkroom began to disappear. Pros began to shoot slides (for reproduction reasons), while amateurs made print film the dominant media. Magazines quit using black-and-white photos, and eventually, even newspapers largely relied on color.

Color was the way that everyone seemed to be going and most new photographers learned the craft through shooting color. Plus, to be perfectly honest, a lot of nature simply looks its best in color, such as the field of Owl's-Clover in figure 1-2. The result was that many photographers



1-2

never experienced the darkroom. Color darkroom work was difficult and required the use of toxic chemicals. And color darkroom work wasn't always very satisfying in terms of results.

For that reason, Ansel Adams never published his personal color work (it only appeared in print after his death). He felt that color just didn't allow the control and craft that he had available to him in the black-and-white darkroom. Because it was hard to make changes after taking the picture when shooting color, a new idea became common to photography through this time of color dominance. This was an idea not part of black-and-white work: that whatever was shot on film had to be complete when the photograph was made.

PHOTOSHOP AND NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY

Adobe Photoshop first came out in the early 1990s and totally changed how color images could be seen. However, at the time, few people really knew much about it. Computers were very expensive and had little power compared to what you can get today. Photoshop became the tool of commercial artists and photographers who wanted to change photographs and make them into illustrations because they were the only ones who could afford it.

When Photoshop and digital capabilities really became known in the photography world (beyond the early adopters), but before the capabilities were commonly used, many nature photographers felt very threatened. They only saw the “fancy footwork” of the image manipulators using Photoshop for advertising and such things.

Even Adobe demonstrated the powers of Photoshop with rather silly examples of cutting out a hot-air balloon and showing it flying by Delicate Arch in Arches National Park. (I didn't make that up — Adobe actually did do that at a photography show!) This didn't do anything to reassure nature photographers. In fact, when *Outdoor Photographer* magazine started introducing readers to Photoshop in the late 1990s, there was much apprehension and even anger that *OP* would do such a thing.

I do not believe Photoshop, when used for nature photography, is about doing funky things to an image. Compare the naturally stunning image in figure 1-3 with the manipulated version of the image seen in figure 1-4. Unless you are trying to do some surrealistic statement, why bother? I am perfectly comfortable with nature's capabilities.

In addition, an important part of nature photography is the experience of being outside; connecting with nature; and relating to flowers, wildlife, landscapes, wind, heat and cold, and so on. None of this can be replaced by time in front of the computer.



1-3



1-4

However, the camera, whether film or digital, simply does not record reality the way you experience it. In fact, though photography's mythology is that the camera is a good way of capturing reality, it really isn't. W. Eugene Smith once said that photography is a great liar because it looks so real — and he died before Photoshop!

Photoshop's great strength for landscape and nature photographers is that it gives you the opportunity to help an image get back to the way you saw the scene in the first place. It gives you the chance to work an image, to bring a level of craft to the photographic process like black-and-white photographers have always done (and are still doing). This program allows you to enhance images so that the true nature of the scene comes across. It also lets you define and enrich a composition so it more clearly communicates everything from the scientific reality of a subject to the emotional meanings of a scene as you photographed it.

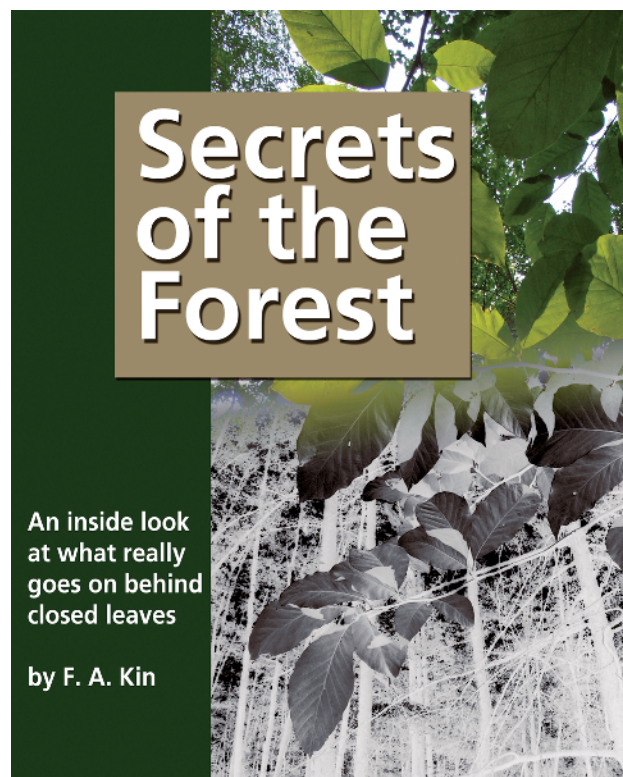
PHOTO-BASED APPROACH

My approach to Photoshop and nature photography is photo-based and not program-centric. A long time ago, when I first started learning Photoshop, I was frustrated with the approach that many instructors and authors used. They were typically computer folks or graphic artists — photographers were not heavily invested in digital at the time. The computer folks tended to talk about using Photoshop as software. What was it capable of? How many selection tools did it have? Here's a demo of all the filters and what they did. They didn't focus on what the photograph needed as much as what Photoshop could do *to* the photograph.

Graphic artists, designers, and such folk used and still use Photoshop to fix photos for their design work or to create illustrations. For them, photographs are never a finished item, but merely raw material for designs they create (see figure 1-5). You can't fault them — that's what they do, and they do it well. But when I was learning Photoshop, these well-meaning experts didn't always give me satisfying answers (and today, they often miss the real

meaning of photographs for the photographer). They would often brutalize an image, from my photographic perspective, showing an interesting technique perhaps, but not really the photography I was interested in.

So, in my workshops and books, my goal is to put the photograph into Photoshop for the photographer. This book is no different. You will see how photographs are approached through Photoshop from a photographer's perspective, and how to look at a photograph to get the most from it, not how to look at Photoshop to remember all of its tools. Trying to remember all of Photoshop's tools is an exercise in frustration for most photographers, and in my experience, can really frustrate nature photographers. While Photoshop is very powerful because it has so many tools, this also makes it quite flexible. And, it also makes it a pain to learn at times. The good news is that if you stay photo-centric, in other words, making the photograph king over the technology, you will discover



you never need to know all of Photoshop's tools. Using a few tools well and with sensitivity to the photograph will always yield better results than simply knowing a lot of tools superficially.

MORE ANSEL ADAMS THAN BILL GATES OR STEVE JOBS

Lots of books offer everything you could possibly want to know about all the Photoshop tools: where they are, what they do, and so forth. Not as many books give you the techniques needed to integrate Photoshop with nature photographers' specific needs. This book is more closely aligned with the craft of photography that Ansel Adams represents than with the computer technology as represented by Bill Gates or Steve Jobs.

Nature photography is not simply a different subject matter. I don't believe this is an affectation. As editor of *Outdoor Photographer*, I have worked with nearly all of the top nature photographers at one time or another. For them, landscape and nature photography are not simply photography, they are a lifestyle, a way of paying homage to something they love, a way of showing off the world, a way of highlighting environmental issues; in short, it is their life.

A good example of this is seen in figure 1-6, which is a photograph of a cecropia caterpillar happily munching on



1-6

an elderberry bush. I like taking pictures of little critters such as this insect and sharing them with others. This cecropia caterpillar is as fantastic as any space movie creature, yet is rarely seen except when a photographer shares an image like this. Such a photo allows me to truly show off an incredible part of our natural world.

Discussion of Photoshop and nature photography needs to keep the factors that make landscape and nature photography appealing to photographers in mind or the resulting techniques will be rather superficial.

This, then, is a book about the photo needs of nature photographers and how those needs can be met using the tools of Photoshop CS2. My model is one of craft, meaning the application of tools in a skillful way in order to create something using the hands and mind. You will be doing all of that in Photoshop. Craft is much more than memorizing Photoshop keystrokes, and involves your strong interaction with the medium; in this case, the photograph. As you work, you learn and gain experience, so that your craft improves with practice.

Ultimately, the photograph, not Photoshop, will tell you what needs to be done. I don't mean this as some Northern California New Age sort of thing. I am simply responding to a way of working that involves watching your photograph evolve in Photoshop and then picking tools that will help you further enhance the image step by step. Each adjustment is then based on making the image do something very specific that makes it fit your needs better. Compare figure 1-7 (the original) and figure 1-8 (adjusted). I am not showing anything about Photoshop here, just two images that show adjustments based on the needs of the subject to have the flowers stand out more from the background.

These photos, though, have used Photoshop for the adjustments. I am not saying that Photoshop and all its wonders are not worth learning for their own sake (and some people do), but that while the changes you make to a photograph use the tools from Photoshop, they are subject- and photo-centric, not Photoshop technology based.



Obviously, throughout this book, I am going to give you specific tools and techniques to try. My point is that these are tools available to use, not tools you must use, and the difference is significant. You always need to go back to the image and really look at it. What is happening to it? Are the changes making the photo better? What can be done that will further enhance the photograph, its composition, its message?



1-7



1-8

A WORKFLOW OVERVIEW

You are going to see a lot of different techniques in these pages. They all relate to working with Photoshop and nature photography. There is also a process, a workflow, if you prefer, that the book follows as well. If you move through the chapters from front to back, you will see a progression of working with images that follows my chosen Photoshop workflow. You will learn more about this later, but a basic workflow goes like this:

1. Adjust and fix overall tonalities of the image: blacks, whites, and midtones.
2. Adjust and fix overall colors of the image: color casts and hue/saturation. You can see overall tonality and color adjustment in the comparison between figures 1-9 and 1-10
3. Look for local changes that need to be made. Adjust and fix specific areas of tonalities and color that are localized to small parts of the photo. Clone out problems.
4. Finish the photo: size it for the use needed and sharpen appropriately.

If you keep referring back to these simple workflow steps, you will find that nearly everything you do to an image fits somewhere in this group. It is in the execution of these ideas that the complexity occurs.

And Photoshop can be complex; there is no doubt about that. However, as you will see in Chapter 2, you don't have to master that complexity in order to master your photograph's needs in Photoshop.

I believe that Ansel Adams is actually a superb model for Photoshop usage, which is an idea that has rarely been expressed in discussions about Photoshop. His methods and workflow can really help the nature photographer.

He believed in going beyond a good print to make a better print. You want to strive for that as well — to create a print that truly fits you and your subject.

Now that you've taken a quick look at a workflow, it's time to get this process going with a visit to Ansel Adams. What would Ansel do about the digital revolution?



1-9



1-10

