

LEWIS AND CLARK AT THE OREGON COAST

Article and Photography by Terry Nathan, Field Contributor

... from this point I beheld the grandest and most pleasing prospects which my eyes ever surveyed ...
Captain William Clark, 1806

Captain Clark's words are as true today as they were almost two centuries ago when he gazed down the Oregon Coast from Tillamook Head. Nestled in Ecola State Park between today's resort towns of Seaside and Cannon Beach, Tillamook Head is a wilderness oasis. Bugling elk roam the old-growth forest, bald eagles soar along the steep cliffs, and massive sea stacks rise majestically from the ocean mist. This region is a visual symphony, a photographer's paradise.

Meriwether Lewis and William Clark and the thirty-one other members of Thomas Jefferson's Corps of Discovery

paddled their dugout canoes down the Columbia River to the Pacific Ocean in 1805. Shortly after their arrival at the mouth of the Columbia, this vanguard of American explorer-naturalists quickly settled into their newly constructed quarters, which they named Fort Clatsop after the local Clatsop Indians.

The Clatsops, who were regular visitors to the fort, soon brought word that a whale had washed ashore just south of where Lewis and Clark had set up a salt-making camp. Because whale blubber and oil were highly valued products, Clark set out with a small party for the coast. From Seaside,

Fog-capped Tillamook Head, Oregon, by Terry Nathan. Nikon F100, Nikkor 28-70mm zoom lens with a Nikon A2 warming filter, Fujichrome Velvia, Bogen 3021 tripod with a ball head.





Coastal light, Ecola Point, Oregon, by Terry Nathan. Nikon F100, Nikkor 28-70mm zoom lens with a Nikon A2 warming filter, Fujichrome Velvia, Bogen 3021 tripod with a ball head.

the party made an arduous eight-mile trek south across Tillamook Head to the beached whale at the north end of Cannon Beach. Today hikers can cross Tillamook Head closely following the trail blazed by Clark. Along this trail you can photograph the animals, plants and magnificent vistas that are so captivatingly described in what many historians have called a national treasure, *The Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*.

The dramatic weather and stunning coastline of the Tillamook Head region combine to provide a palette of light and compositional diversity that inspire creative nature photography. Among the many photographic vantage points are Cannon Beach, Ecola Point, Indian Beach and the six-mile hiking trail. In addition, several of the animal and plant species that were first described to science by Lewis and Clark can also be photographed here. Such species include Roosevelt elk, northwestern crow, western bracken fern and old-growth Sitka spruce.

Cannon Beach is among the most photographed spots on the Oregon coast and for good reason. It is easily accessible, bird life is abundant, and several vertical rock formations called seastacks provide dramatic silhouettes at sunset. The most famous of the seastacks is Haystack Rock, which is a designated marine and bird sanctuary. Located near the breaking surf and rising 235 feet above the ocean, it is the third highest coastal monolith in the world.

Haystack Rock provides numerous photographic opportunities. Backlit at sunset, it forms a bold silhouette against the sky and clouds. A wide range of focal lengths can be used to create images with varying visual impacts.

Telephoto lenses in the 300-400mm range can be used to capture silhouettes of the many birds that call Haystack Rock home, while wide-angle lenses in the 20-35mm range can be used to lure viewers into the scene by enhancing the depth perspective. For these wide-angle compositions, the receding surf or cloud reflections in wet sand can provide a dramatic foreground for distant seastacks. Creating such images requires some technical considerations.

The first consideration is depth of field (DOF), which is the distance within a scene that appears acceptably sharp. To insure that the DOF is maximized so that the beach and distant seastacks are both sharp, the lens should be set at the smallest aperture and focused at the hyperfocal distance. The hyperfocal distance, which is a function of lens focal length and lens F-stop, is defined as the distance from the camera to the nearest point that is sharp when the lens is focused at infinity. If the lens is set at the hyperfocal distance, everything from half that distance to infinity will be sharp. For example, for a lens set at 24mm and an aperture of f/22, the hyperfocal distance is about three feet, so everything from a foot and half to infinity will be sharp. The easiest way to obtain the hyperfocal distance is to consult a chart, which is readily available on a number of web sites or from photographic stores.

The second consideration when photographing Cannon Beach is related to the extraordinary lighting contrast that occurs between the foreground and the sky at sunset. Human vision can hold shadow and highlight detail over about twelve stops of light; transparency film can hold shadow and highlight detail over only about four stops of



Raging sea, Indian Beach, Ecola State Park, Oregon, by Terry Nathan. Nikon F100, Nikkor 80-400mm VR zoom lens with a Nikon A2 warming filter, Fujichrome Velvia, Bogen 3021 tripod with a ball head.

light. At sunset, the lighting contrast between the sky and the foreground is often four stops or more. If you meter for the sky, the beach will appear black. If you meter for the foreground, the sky will be washed out. If you average the meter readings for the beach and the sky, then neither will look good. All is not lost, however. A graduated neutral-density (ND) filter can be used to compress the lighting contrast between the beach and the sky. Graduated ND filters are part dark and part light and come in one-, two- and three-stop densities in both soft and hard graduations.

The graduated ND filter is a useful tool for photographing high contrast scenes; however, using it effectively requires some practice. My approach to using the graduated ND filter is to first determine the contrast range of the scene by metering the sky and the foreground separately. At Cannon Beach at sunset, I found the range to be about five stops, which is outside transparency film's ability to hold detail in both sky and beach. To bring into closer alignment what I could see with what the film could see, I used a rectangular, soft-edge, two-stop graduated ND filter, which I inserted into a filter holder that screws onto the lens. I slid the filter down until the dark part completely covered the lens and then metered the sky above the horizon, opening up a stop and a half above middle tone. Having placed the sky in what I considered to be the appropriate tonal value, I recomposed the scene and repositioned the filter so that the filter's dark area remained over the sky. Repositioning the filter and aligning the graduation line can sometimes be tricky. I find

that slightly moving the filter while stopping down the lens with the depth-of-field preview button is helpful in positioning the filter. When the filter is properly positioned, the lighting contrast of the scene has been reduced from five to three stops, thus preserving detail in both the sky and the beach.

Ecola Point is a couple of miles north of Cannon Beach and has some of the most dramatic coastal vistas in the Tillamook Head region. Of this view, Clark wrote: "... innumerable rocks of emence Sise out at a great distance from the Shore and against which the Seas brak[e] with great force gives this Coast a most romantic appearance." A most romantic appearance indeed! To the north is rugged, fog-shrouded Tillamook Head, to the west is what Clark called the "boundless Ocean," and to the south are seastacks that rise above the ocean mist from Cannon Beach to as far south as the eye can see.

Ecola Point's moody weather provides a great variety of lighting. The south view is best just after sunrise when the seastacks rise above the thin fog layer and are side-lit by the rising sun. Because the lighting contrast between the sky and the ocean may be quite large, a graduated ND filter may be required. Additionally, because a large fraction of the scene may be shrouded in bright fog, the camera exposure meter must be overridden to render the fog the proper tone. For scenes with bright fog, I meter off the fog and open up the aperture by a stop and a half to two stops.

Indian Beach is a couple miles north of Ecola Point. It can be reached by a two-mile trail or by car on the only road that



Gathering at sunset, Haystack Rock, Cannon Beach, Oregon, by Terry Nathan. Nikon F100, Nikkor 80-400mm VR zoom lens with a Nikon A2 warming filter, Fujichrome Velvia, Bogen 3021 tripod with a ball head.

runs through Ecola State Park. The trail provides many ocean vistas from which to photograph, and Indian Beach provides a great vantage point to photograph what Clark described as the "Seas raging with emence wave[s]" that crash on the massive seastacks.

North from Indian Beach the Tillamook Head Trail climbs to more than a thousand feet above the ocean and travels six miles to Seaside, winding through an old-growth Sitka spruce and western hemlock forest. This trail provides many ocean vistas and, if you're lucky, a glimpse of a bald eagle soaring

"Today hikers can cross Tillamook Head closely following the trail blazed by Clark."

along the steep cliffs that rise dramatically from the ocean. When the fog rolls in, the forest light becomes soft and diffuse and the old-growth trees emerge as stately sentinels.

The ever-changing light and stunning scenery is what makes Tillamook Head one of the most outstanding photographic locations along the Lewis and Clark Trail. Wandering the old-growth forest, standing at Ecola Point at first light and watching the sun slowly set behind Haystack Rock make it easy to appreciate Clark's sense of wonder as he gazed

down the Oregon coastline nearly two centuries ago. This same coastline continues to inspire naturalists and photographers today.

THE LEWIS AND CLARK BICENTENNIAL

This year, 2003, marks the beginning of a three-year bicentennial celebration of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. This epic journey, which forever changed the course of American history, spanned a period of twenty-eight months and covered more than 8,000 miles. Beginning near St. Louis, Missouri, the expedition paddled up the Missouri, crossed the Bitterroot Mountains, and paddled down the Snake River to the Columbia River and on to the Pacific Coast, eventually returning to St. Louis. In addition, Lewis and Clark recorded for science over 170 new plant species and 120 new animal species and described with great clarity a land of unparalleled natural beauty.

Lewis and Clark's spirit of adventure and careful observations of the environment are an inspiration to nature photographers today. The greater Tillamook Head region contains many photographic sites along the Lewis and Clark Trail, including Cape Disappointment, Fort Clatsop National Historic Site and the Columbia River Gorge. Two of the many excellent resources that provide information on where to photograph along the Lewis and Clark Trail are *National Geographic's Guide to the Lewis and Clark Trail* by Thomas Schmidt and the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation web site (<http://www.lewisandclark.org>).

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