


Every Picture Tells a Story

Windy Peak Hills

by Dr. Robert Berdan



I awoke at 4 a.m. to an alarm ... in the back of a pickup truck. We were parked at the side of a dirt road off Highway 532 on the southeast edge of Kananaskis Country and I hadn't slept all that well due to the air mattress bobbing annoyingly all night whenever my friend or I moved.

The night before, we had driven up the dirt road until a gate prevented us from going any further. We discovered later that the primary purpose of this road is to permit oil and gas workers to service some of the gas wells. Our plan was to hike along a high ridge nearby and photograph the Rockies at sunrise. It was early summer and although it was cool up on the hillside, we only needed light jackets. After a cup of coffee from my thermos and a power bar, I pulled out my flashlight, strapped on my bear spray and hoisted my 40-pound camera pack over my shoulder – it always feels heavier first thing in the morning.

I was surprised to hear distant voices in the darkness, and soon noticed a group of hikers making their way towards us with head lamps. Amazingly, we weren't the only crazies up that early. We exchanged polite greetings and began hiking, all the while keeping a lookout for bears – this being prime Grizzly country.

After about an hour, we reached a high ridge with a great vantage point of the mountains and began to look for potential spots to set up. As we heard the high pitched sound of pikas in the rocks, a light wind began to blow in from the west.

The view was spectacular, and it reminded me how great it is to be alive and why I love being a nature photographer. The sun broke the horizon behind us and we could see alpenglow on the tops of the highest peaks. We set up our tripods, and as the sun rose higher, we quickly took picture after picture trying to capture the vibrancy of colour over the emerging landscape. Then, after an all too brief 10 minutes, the moment was gone.

This trip took place over 10 years ago, yet every time I see this image, it feels like yesterday. Proof that a photograph records more than just a single image: it records the whole experience.

Dr. Robert Berdan, a professional nature and wildlife photographer, runs his own multimedia business and serves as an assistant professor at the University of Calgary.

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