

QUACK

Newsletter of E.J. Peiker, Nature Photographer and www.EJPhoto.com
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Welcome to the quarterly newsletter from E.J. Peiker Nature Photography and www.EJPhoto.com. In this quarterly email publication, I will keep subscribers posted on upcoming workshops including the DuckShop Series as well as sharing some photos and experiences with you. I will also give you brief impressions on any new equipment that I get the opportunity to use and any other general information in the world of digital nature photography. Please feel free to forward this along to other photographers and interested parties but please do so only by forwarding this newsletter in its entirety. Please note that all content is copyrighted by E.J. Peiker. If you would like to be added or deleted to the mailing list or if you would like copies of past issues, just send me an email message at ejpeiker@cox.net. Back issues are available online at <http://www.ejphoto.com/newsletter.htm>



Barnafoss, Iceland (EOS 1Ds Mark II, 70-200mm)

The Land of Fire and Ice

This quarter's edition of Quack is about a week late due to a photography trip to Iceland. I am writing the summer edition as I am flying between the Keflavik airport in Iceland and Boston after 10 fantastic days in the land of Fire and Ice. Iceland's northern edge is right at the Arctic Circle and it is called the land of Fire and Ice due to the active volcanic nature of the island and its abundance of glacial ice. For someone living in Phoenix, where it's between 110 and 118 degrees this time of year with about 14 hours of sunlight, going to somewhere where it's 50 degrees on a warm day and sunlight 24 hours a day, it is quite a large change but a fantastic experience. This was primarily a bird photography trip with Greg Downing and Johann Oli Hilmarsson, the author of the definitive book on Icelandic Birds – Icelandic Bird Guide (http://www.nordicstore.net/icelandic_bird_guide_291_prd1.htm?scart_affiliate_id=6) There were also plenty of opportunities to photograph waterfalls, glaciers and other point of interest. As I leave, I already can't wait to get back with a specific focus on landscapes.

After landing in Iceland, we almost immediately started on our photo journey by traveling up the west side of Iceland. We stopped and photographed at a number of locations on the Vesturland Peninsula where we spent the night in Stykkishulmur, a small and picturesque maritime town. On the second day we took an early morning ferry to Flatey Island in the Breidafjordur (fjordur=fjord). We stayed on this tiny island for an afternoon photographing birds such as Northern Fulmar, Common Eider, Redshank, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Arctic Tern, and Black Guillemots along with sheep and the quaint village on the island. Flatey has only two permanent year round families and a number of summer houses. Especially quaint are the church and library which sit at the highest point of the island with sheep, Arctic Tern and Redshanks standing guard. Later in the afternoon we re-boarded the ferry and went on our way to the Vesterdir region of Iceland and the spectacular bird cliffs at Latrabjarg. We stayed for three nights at a small lodge in Breidavik and worked the Latrabjarg cliffs where we photographed Atlantic Puffins at very close range along with Razorbills, Black-legged Kittiwake and Fulmars. During our stay in this region, while driving, we came upon a beautiful unnamed waterfall and three gorgeous Icelandic horses that were incredibly tame. One followed me around for a while and I got the opportunity to pet it pose with it for photos and photograph it. This started my newfound love for these Iceland Horses. I never quite got the attraction many people have for horses but I get it now! Next we worked our way back down across the water with another stay at Flatey Island where I added Meadow Pipit and Ringed Plover to the collection of birds photographed while in Iceland. After another night in Stykkishulmur we made a stop at the spectacular Barnafoss Waterfalls. This mile long line of waterfalls come out of the sides of the cliffs with no obvious water source on top. The source is a glacial river that runs underground through lava tubes and dumps out in this location.

Next we worked our way through the west central part of the island crossing on a cinder road between Ok Mountain and Geitlandsjokull Glacier (jokull=glacier) where we stopped and did some wide panoramas of the fantastic glaciers. From there we continued our journey to our evening stay near the town of Sellfoss and a lodge on a large horse farm. This farm offers complete horseback vacation packages in Iceland. While there we went to the coastal wetlands at the Floi Nature Reserve which Johann, our local guide and Icelandic Bird expert helped to create. Here we photographed Red-throated Loons, Dunlin and Black-tailed Godwit. The next day we made our way east along the southern coast of Iceland stopping at various points along the way to photograph landscapes, horses, sea stacks and waterfalls. A particularly scenic area was the cliffs and mountains around the town of Vik.

After a long day of travel we arrived at our next base in Skaftafel National Park, home of the largest glacier in all of Europe - the Vatnajokull. Our first morning here we drove further east to the absolutely stunning Glacial Lagoon at Jokullsarlon. This is a place where freshly calved Icebergs float in the beautiful glacial waters of a large lagoon with mountains and glaciers as a backdrop. In the evening we went to the Puffin and Skua cliffs at Ingolshoff which is a large outcropping offshore separated by a black sand flood plain that you tractor across - sometimes through relatively deep water. After climbing to the top we were able to photograph Great Skuas and Atlantic Puffins. Some of the Puffins even had Sand Eels in their mouths. Unfortunately the light was very poor that evening resulting in extremely slow shutter speed and lots of flash use but these are the types of situations that provide a wonderful challenge to the Nature Photographer.

The next day was Day 9 and it was already time to start making our way back toward Reykjavik as we were starting to get close to the end of our time in Iceland. On the way back we photographed some more beautiful waterfalls and glaciers. We spent another night at the Eldhestar Horse Ranch Lodge and did some more Red-throated Loon photography at the Floi Reserve before heading to Reykjavik the next morning. Once in Reykjavik, we photographed the tame gulls and Ducks in the downtown pond called Tjorn and then bid adieu to those leaving that day. Some of our flights, including mine were the next morning so we got an opportunity to ride around Reykjavik, looking for other birds and getting a feel for the town. An evening walk and dinner in downtown Reykjavik brought the trip to a close.



Atlantic Puffin, Iceland (EOS 1D Mark IIIn, 500mm)

Overall this was a great trip and I highly recommend it, especially for those that want to expand their library of birds. While in Iceland we saw and photographed:
Red-throated Loon

Common Loon*
Atlantic Puffin
Razorbill
Black Guillemot
Common Murre*
Thick-billed Murre
Black-headed Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Glaucous Gull
Black-legged Kittiwake
Arctic Tern
Great Skua
Arctic Skua (Parasitic Jaeger)
Common Eider
Harlequin Duck
Tufted Duck
Northern Mallard
Greater Scaup
Eurasian Wigeon
Whooper Swan
Graylag Goose
Ruddy Turnstone
Dunlin
Great Golden Plover
Whimbrel
Red-necked Phalarope
Black-tailed Godwit
Ringed Plover
Eurasian Oystercatcher
Meadow Pipit
Redwing
Snow Bunting
White Wagtail
Blackbird
European Starling
Wheatear
Barn Swallow*
Redpoll*
Wilson's Snipe
White-tailed Eagle*
Short-eared Owl*

* Viewable but not photographable

I very much want to plan a return trip focused on Landscapes which would dictate being awake from 8:00PM to 6:00AM and traveling and sleeping during the daytime hours - basically reversing day and night to have great light for landscape photos. Iceland was a fantastic experience, one I will not ever forget. Besides Greg Downing organizing a great trip I would also like to endorse Gavia Travel in Iceland. They set up the logistics and did a phenomenal

job. If you do go and use Gavia, please mention Greg's and my name. As the current Governor of California would say "I'll be baaak"

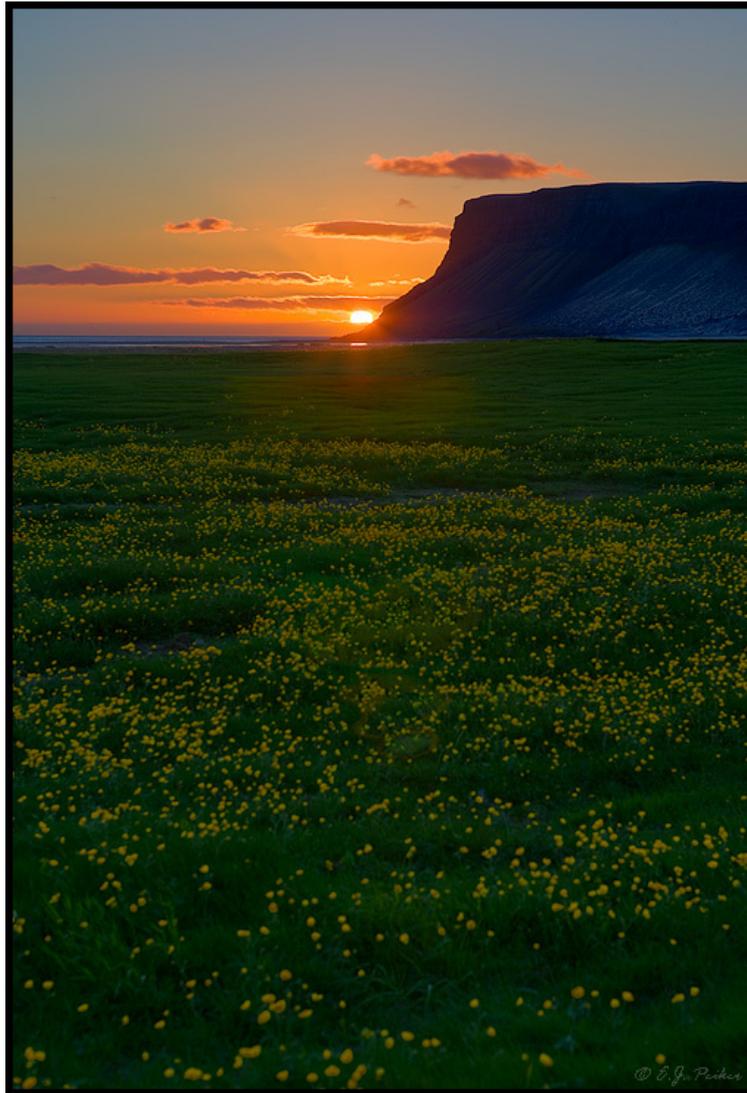


Glacial Lagoon, Iceland (EOS 1Ds Mark II, 24-70mm)

L-lenses: They Don't Make them Like They Used To

It used to be that L-lenses could take a pretty good beating and not miss a beat. Perhaps the white paint might scratch a bit or the mount might need to be tightened with a jeweler's Phillips head screwdriver but other than that they could handle war zone use. I found out in Iceland that some of the new models use very cheap plastic for key components that are not up to the rigors of the professional, advanced amateur or traveling photographer. While in Iceland, my 70-200 f/4L IS took a fall into a tall soft field of grass. I would expect even the cheapest of kit lenses to survive this fall. My 70-200 came apart. Upon closer examination, the entire outer barrel from the zoom ring back to the lens mount is made of a very thin plastic. It is made to look like the strong rugged white metal that we are accustomed to on L-lenses. This area has to hold the heavy part of the lens with all the lens elements. The heavy part is attached via

four very small and light plastic tabs with screws. All 4 plastic tabs snapped at the screws rendering the lens completely unusable and in two pieces. This is unacceptable lens construction for something to be purported as a professional grade lens designed for heavy duty field use. User beware! While, optically, it is one of Canon's best zooms, physically it is not constructed for environments where it might be shocked, vibrated, or tossed around. After examining the lens further, I am convinced that these plastic tabs had started to break even before the fall, possibly due to the rough roads that we encountered along the way. It is a very disappointing and troubling development - we cannot have our lenses be cheapened like this - I would gladly pay \$20 or \$50 more for a lens that weighs one or two more ounces with a metal outer barrel.



1:00AM – Breidavik, Iceland (EOS 1Ds Mark II, 24-70mm)

A warning for BH-55 Users

Another equipment casualty while traveling the sometimes rough roads in Iceland was the BH-55 Ballhead. Fortunately this was a very temporary situation. On BH-55's, the panning base is held to the rest of the ballhead via 4 very small hex key bolts on the bottom of the tripod head. The constant rattling across the road backed these out resulting in a very wobbly ballhead where the panning base is loose. After tracking down a small hex key that fit I was able to

tighten them up with a bit of blue Loctite. However, later when traveling on another rough road they backed out again. This time I decided to take the panning base off and found that the graphite lubricant used in the construction of the ballhead essentially turns blue Loctite into a water like consistency. I took some time and carefully cleaned everything, especially the screws and also the receiving threads, with tissue made into a small spear. I then put a drop of an orange colored gel that I got from John Zeiss of 4th Generation Designs (Manufacturer of the best replacement feet for large lenses) and let it set for 12 hours and it has been fine ever since. If you are a BH55 user, check the tightness of the tiny hex bolts on bottom and if they have started to back out, I recommend the repair described above.



Razorbill, Iceland (EOS 1D Mark IIIn, 500mm, 1.4x)

Photoshop Tip of the Quarter

This quarter's Photoshop tip is one that will help you keep images organized in Bridge. Bridge has a cool feature called stacks. It's right there on the menu bar but is often overlooked. Let's say you are taking several shots at different exposures (exposure bracketing). Perhaps you are taking one shot for the highlights and one for the shadows and another one in between for input to an HDR program such as Photomatix. Or maybe you just took a burst of shots of a

bird on a perch. These shots can clutter your bridge window. Here is a neat trick for grouping all of those related images. Simply highlight them all in Bridge and then select Stacks > Group as Stack or even simpler, just hit Ctrl G. A third alternative is to right click the mouse after selecting all of the shots and then picking the Stack > Group as Stack option. You will see all of the images collapse down to one and an extra frame will appear around the thumbnail as well as a number that tells you how many images are in a stack. If you ever want to undo a stack, simply hit Shift – Ctrl G or select Stacks > Ungroup from Stack. This is an incredibly easy and useful tool, especially for those that take multiple exposures or multiple shots that are nearly identical.



E.J. At Glacial Lagoon, Iceland (© C. Marple used with permission)

DuckShop 2009 Update

I am late in getting the DuckShop 2009 Schedule online due to some travel dates which are not yet firm. As soon as they are finalized, I will be sending a short notice to this distribution and shortly after post details on EJPhoto.com.

EJPhoto Closed Dates

In order to continue to bring you photographs and experiences, I travel to some places that are remote and have no Internet service or at best spotty service. This year, this will happen on the following dates:

July 2-7, 2008

August 31 – September 12, 2008

Any orders or questions during that time will be handled on a first come first serve basis once I return.

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