



THROUGH THE LENS: BIG CYPRESS

Peter J. Nolan, Happy Hoofers

OVERVIEW

The Big Cypress National Preserve is a wonderful yet challenging place to photograph. It takes patience and dedication to make quality photographs, but opportunities are abundant and anyone with desire can produce quality work. I believe that photography is a skill that anyone can learn and Big Cypress is an ideal place to develop your vision.

EQUIPMENT

The big debate today is between digital and film. Which is better? Unless you are shooting medium format or large format, the answer is digital. The advantages of a digital SLR over a 35mm SLR are numerous. The same is true for 35mm “point and shoots”. However, the one constant is this: make sure you use a quality lens. The good news is that many of the new higher-end digital “point and shoots” include high quality glass. If you are using a digital SLR, consider a non-zoom, or “prime lens” for the best quality.

The second most important tool is the tripod. If you want sharp photos, you must use a tripod. A good tripod with a “ball-head” is a joy to use. Opt for a lower end version of one of the well-known brands. I use a Bogen for hiking and find it perfectly satisfactory.

The third tool is optional and may not be available for some cameras: the polarizer filter. If your lens allows the use of a filter, your number one choice should be a polarizer. Why? Three reasons: 1) The filter lessens glare from water. The foreground of your photograph will be richer and more saturated. 2) The filter will darken the sky and the clouds will be more detailed. 3) All colors will be more saturated and in some cases “warmer.” If your kit allows filters, get a polarizer and learn how to use it. I consider it an essential ingredient for photographing wetlands.



CONDITIONS

Conditions in Big Cypress change continuously. For the most part, early morning and late afternoon are the best times to photograph. Hazy or overcast days are ideal for shooting under the trees while sunny days are best for open spaces. Also, be aware that the weather can change in a very short period of time, especially in late spring and summer. Always bring sealable plastic bags to store your gear. It is also advisable to remember (or mark with a GPS) promising locations. Some locations are better served by evening light rather than morning and being able to return to a promising spot under ideal conditions will add shots to your portfolio.

PHILOSOPHY

My philosophy is: "Shoot what you like; like what you shoot". Photography is a personal endeavor and must be approached in this way. Walk slow. Take your time. You will notice that certain things will catch your eye. Why? What is it that intrigues you? The answer to this question is what separates the work of all photographers. Good luck. ■

ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER

Peter J. Nolan is a professional photographer based in Fort Lauderdale. Specializing in South Florida scenic and landscape photography, Peter concentrates his efforts in capturing the beauty of the wetlands and swamps of Big Cypress. See more of Peter's work at www.digitaltree.com.

