

Weather Beaten or Weather Beautified?



I happened across the Old Patriarch some ten years ago while perusing images of the northwest Wyoming landscape. The page flipped and there in stark black and white this twisted, battle-scarred, old limber pine stood proudly before the Cathedral Group of the Grand Teton Range. I had been to and photographed the Tetons many times, yet to date

had missed this most intriguing subject. So commenced my search.

The Grand Tetons are both a wonderful and an awful photographic challenge. While it is virtually, nigh on, impossible to capture a bad image of such a ruggedly, beautiful landscape, it is equally as difficult to create a wonderfully unique one.

Nevertheless, while searching the Tetons for new, interesting perspectives, I continue to shoot the standards — Oxbow Bend, Snake River Overlook, Schwabacher's Landing, Mormon's Row etc. Even though my images may resemble previously published work (even my own), they are singular because I create them: I map the location, study the light, set up the equipment, orchestrate the composition, choose the lens, calculate the exposure, edit the image, and finally, print it. How much more unique can I get? Does not each person's vision exist as no other vision ever has or ever will?



With each new photographic venture, I research the area via books, magazines, newspapers, the Internet, photographic travel guides, local publications, and in person among the natives. Culling through all this information helps identify specific settings worth investigating.

Finally on location, I set aside all previous work, mine included, and concentrate solely on what is before me at that moment in time, neither colored by my past nor defined by my future. Questions arise. What does my artist within want to



create? Of all that is now before me, what am I going to include/exclude and thereby magnify via this image? What has drawn me to this place at this time?

My search for the Old Patriarch included, among various resources, a book detailing photographic locations within Grand Teton National Park; this aged pine stood among them. I meticulously followed the book's directions on numerous occasions, but to no avail. This tree's location, even existence, remained, for me, a mystery.

At long last, I happened upon a forest ranger who solved this enigma by pointing out that the park road used as the focal point of this photographic guidebook had a number of years before been moved several miles west.

With my investigation refocused, I roamed for hours the Jackson Hole prairie tracking the faded footprint of the former roadbed. Finally, this gnarled old warrior fell within my viewfinder.

Limber pines thrive on the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains of the western United States and Canada. This particular pine was no exception. However, by the time I finally found it, the sun had slipped behind Mt. Teewinot leaving insufficient light to photograph, so I mapped its exact location to insure my return.

For all interested, the tree stands about 350 yards due east of the 'Approaching Junction' sign as you approach North Jenny Lake Junction from the south.

These solitary, highland pines, tempered by an unforgiving environment, bear the name limber for their knack of distorting and contorting but rarely splintering against the fierce winds and beneath the severe snows indigenous to their ecosystem. No exception, this tenacious old specimen — bent, twisted, deformed, bowed — continues to challenge nature's fury undaunted. How easily do you break; how carefully must you be kept?

A brazen beauty shrouds this courageous conifer. The Old Patriarch leans into life with jagged limbs pointing windward, residual foliage clinging to the



south, and the surviving bark worn to a reddish brown. Exposed heartwood reveals a life of relentless struggle. Have you, in concert with the Old Patriarch, survived weather-beaten or weather-beautified?

