

# CAPTURE MOUNT RAINIER

## A GUIDE TO LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY IN MT. RAINIER NATIONAL PARK

*By Adam Angel.*

Mt Rainier National Park is truly a unique and special place. It is an island of ecosystems and climates, with many scientific, experiential, and creative treasures. Whether you're an expert photographer or just beginning, Mount Rainier National Park has some of the most stunning scenery in the world. Come explore, visit its flanks, stand on its summit, and experience what locals call "The Mountain."

### **Mount Rainier National Park Mission Statement**

"Together we preserve, for future generations, the natural and cultural resources in Mount Rainier National Park. Through a variety of high quality park experiences, we promote park values, personal connections, and responsibility for the environment in our local and global communities. With integrity, teamwork, pride, and motivation, we demonstrate



environmental leadership and deepen our understanding of the park's ecosystems. We value our diverse range of individual contributions by showing respect and concern for each other and the park. The Mountain inspires stewardship. Its protection and preservation is our legacy."

When visiting the park make sure that you are doing your part to preserve the experience for future generations. Familiarize yourself with *Leave No Trace* principles and with *Climate Friendly Parks*. Visit [www.lnt.org](http://www.lnt.org) and [www.nps.gov/climatefriendlyparks](http://www.nps.gov/climatefriendlyparks) for more information.

## Tips for shooting on Mount Rainier

*Composition:* Some photos are simply more pleasing to the eye than others. A very basic rule behind successful images is the “rule of thirds.” Look at this shot of Mount Rainier from a Cessna 172. I have put a rule of thirds overlay on the image for instructional purposes. Note that the mountain is not centered in the image, it is centered on one of the points where thirds intersect. These are powerful locations with great visual impact. The strut crosses about a third of the image and diagonal lines create visual excitement and depth in a two dimensional space. The image is also divided up with the forest in the lowest third, the alpine zone in the middle third, and the sky/clouds in the upper third. The wing dominates the right third of the image. Don’t be afraid to experiment with composition, with digital it’s easy!



Is your horizon straight?

*Tripod and Shutter Release:* Tripods are an essential tool for creating a well thought out composition. Move freely about with your camera in hand, and experiment through the viewfinder with different compositions. When you find something that you like, bring out the tripod and lock the camera down. From this position you can fine tune the composition, paying very close attention to the edges of the frame and to the guidelines mentioned above. The tripod will enable you to get the best possible composition, and to keep the camera steady for the sharpest shot possible. Make sure that your tripod can get very low to the ground, and research the many tripod head options available. Depending on the situation, I use both *Pan-Tilt* and *Ball* tripod heads. Lastly, don't negate the security that the tripod provides, by bumping the legs, head and camera. This includes using the shutter button on the camera. You can purchase a cabled shutter release, so that that you won't have to jostle the camera every time you take a shot. Most good cameras will also have a mirror lockup function that will keep the mirror mechanism from jostling the camera during exposure.

*Time of Day:* Perhaps the hardest part of landscape photography is the period of the day that successful landscape photographers work. The time is called "Magic Light" which occurs during civil twilight and sunrise/sunset. During the longest days of the summer this schedule is *brutal* but the rewards are many. There are many online options for calculating this information, but the best software that I know of (as of this publishing) is Stephen Trainor's "The Photographer's Ephemeris." You can download the program here:

[www.stephentrainor.com/tools](http://www.stephentrainor.com/tools)



*Clothing:* With extreme hours come extreme temperatures. On Mount Rainier you can encounter very cold temperatures any time of the year. Great images are always easier to capture if you're comfortably warm. Layer your clothing so you can take off or

add an extra layer as appropriate. I always carry a lightweight hooded down parka as well, and “fingerless” gloves. Be prepared to kneel or even lie down on the snow or ground.



*Metering:* Metering systems on digital cameras are consistent, but have their limitations. For many of the prime shooting locations in Mt. Rainier National Park you will need *split neutral density* filters or to blend exposures in a photo editing program. Basic understanding of your camera’s histogram will greatly improve your results.

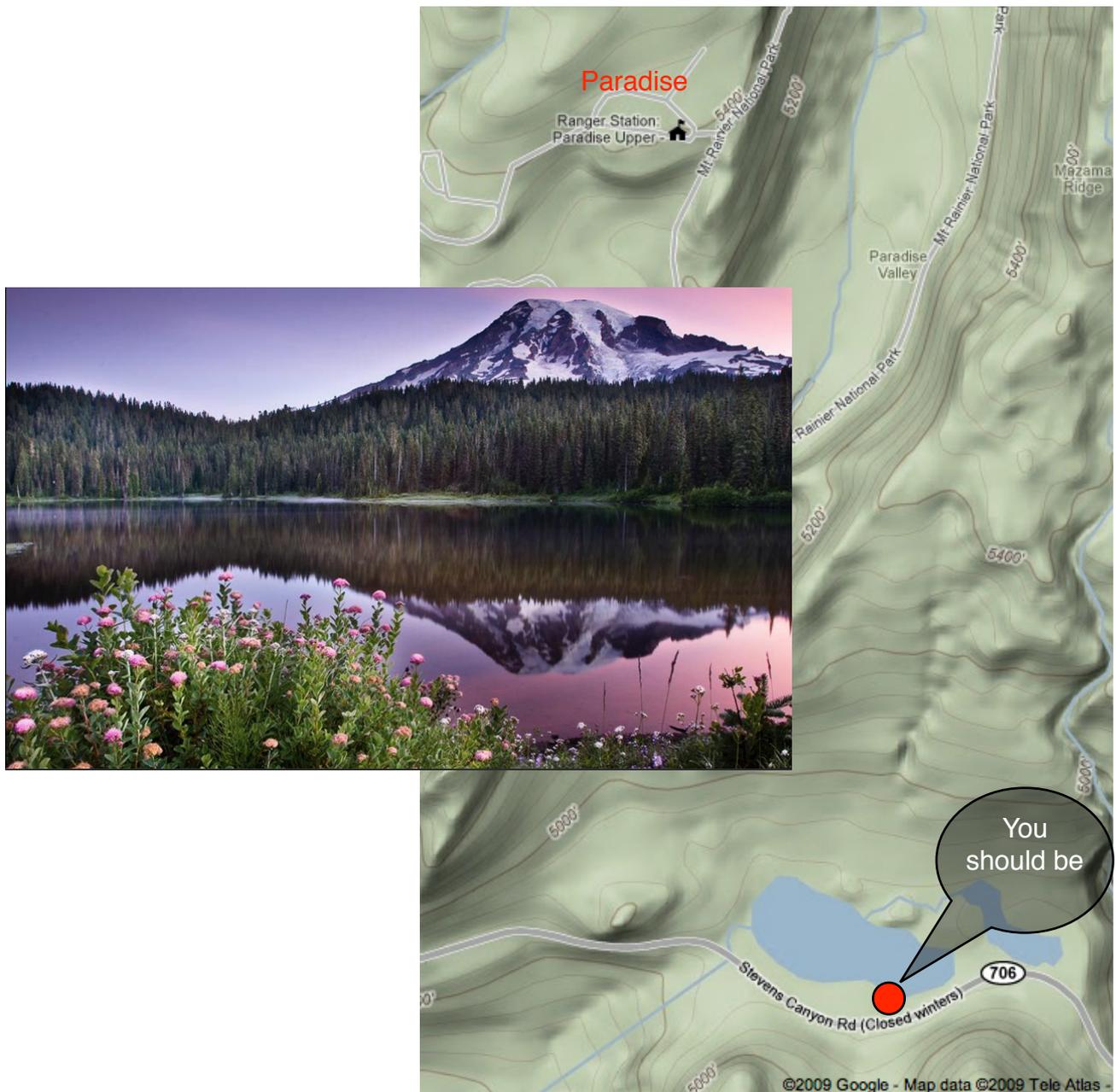
The histogram is a chart that displays the range of light and dark tones in your shot. The left side of the chart shows the dark areas, the right side the light areas, and the middle shows the mid-tones. Try to contain the image tones within this histogram. Some cameras will have flashing highlight warnings that show where image data has been obliterated due to overexposure.



## Popular Locations

## Reflection Lake

I'm often asked how to get off the beaten path to find the really good stuff. The most honest answer is that the popular spots are popular for a reason. That's not to say that there aren't hidden gems throughout the park, but Reflection lake is as good as it gets. You can drive up to your shooting location, get out of the car and walk a few feet to one of the best places in the park. I prefer to shoot at this location in the mornings, but it can be good any time of day including the evenings.



## Christine Falls

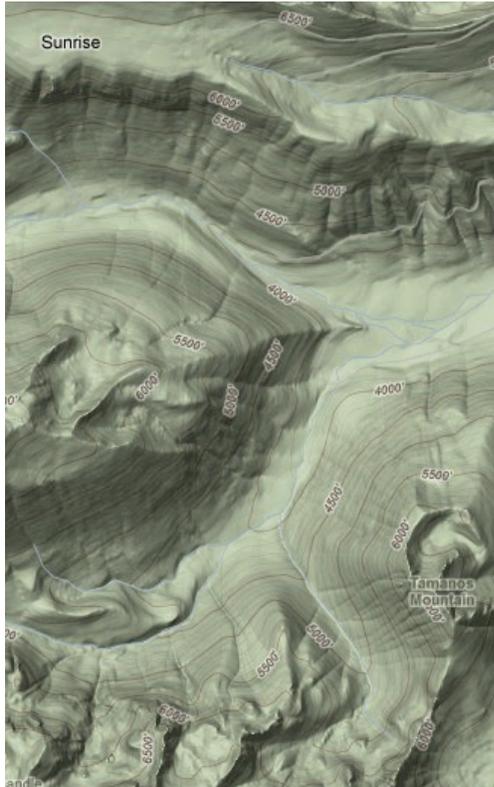
Another location that is a few steps from the car, is good in any kind of weather and is accessible all year is Christine Falls. The only issue at this viewpoint can be crowding, so shoot here during off hours. At first this location seems constricting, but keep moving



around the small area and experimenting with different compositions. There is more variation in this area than meets the eye!

## Tipsoo Lake

Another fantastic sunrise location is Tipsoo Lake on the eastern side of the park. This is a great



place to capture sunrise, and has great access. Give yourself some time at this location to scout out a shooting spot. There are so many options

that it may take a little more time and thought to decide where to shoot from.

I sincerely hope that this information will help your landscape images improve. I've only touched on some of the elements that go towards making great images, but as you will find on all your travels, the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

Adam Angel