"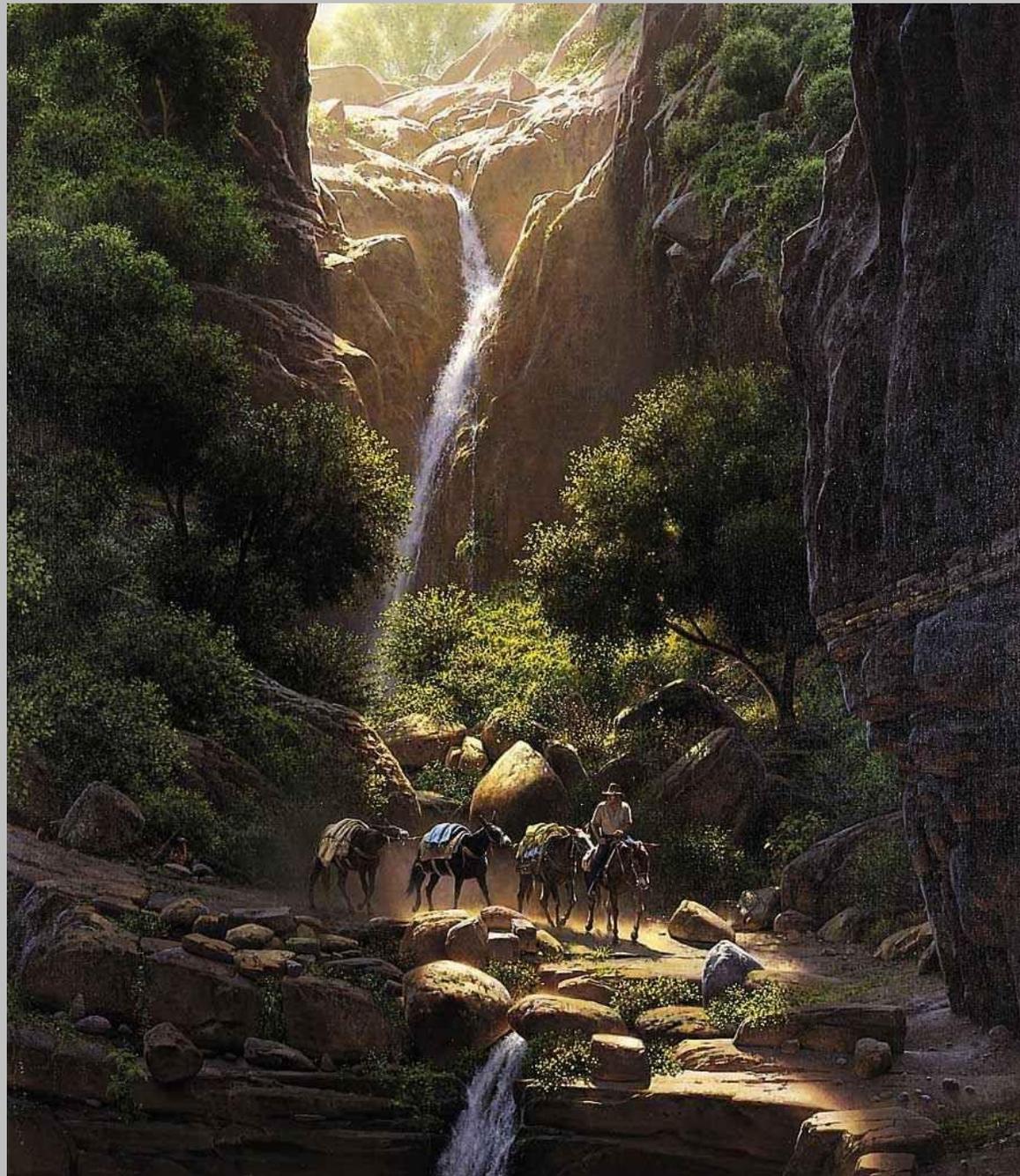Knowing where to look in a picture is not the viewer's responsibility; it's your responsibility as the photographer to tell the viewer where to look."

David Osborn, The Luminous Landscape

Bill Hughes, (1932-1992)
***Canyon Passage**, 1991*
Oil on canvas
Booth Museum of
Western Art

Cypress Swamp, Rural Georgia

Creating Visual Flow

Telling Your Viewer Where To Look

Chuck Derus

MAPS October 14, 2024

Objectives

1. Understand the camera's two differences: limited dynamic range and a lack of motion

2. Try three compositional structures in the field that create depth telling the viewer where to look and how to move through the image

3. Introduce you to eight transitions that create depth that can be accentuated in post processing

4. Introduce you to seven field tools that create depth

Bryan Hansel's Three Rules Of Composition

- First rule of composition: There are no rules.

- Second rule of composition: There are NO rules.

- Third rule of composition: If anyone tells you there are rules, see rule one and two.

Lake Superior near Grand Marais, Minnesota
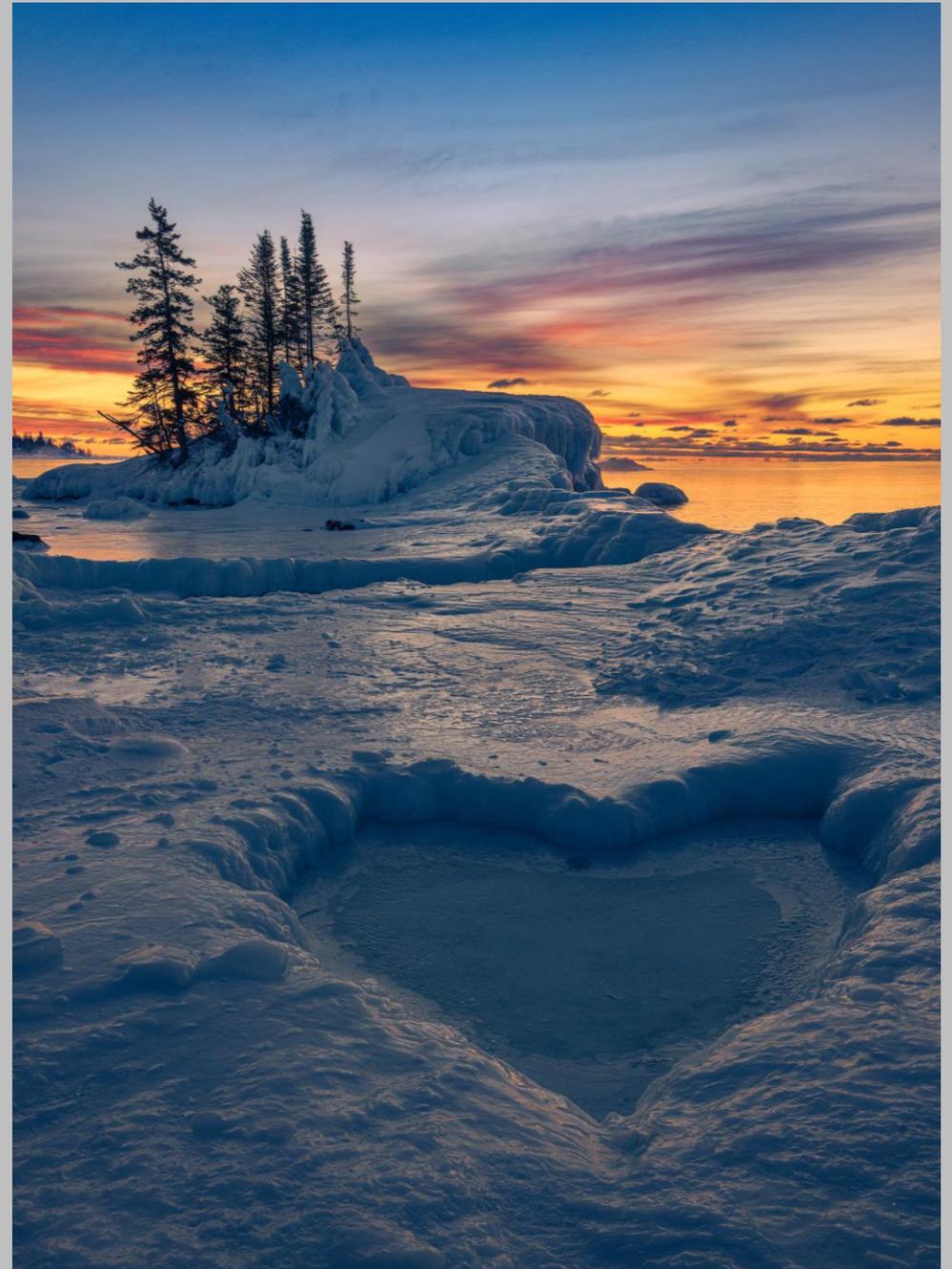
Landscape Challenges

- Not one, but multiple subjects

- Subjects need to be complimentary

- Subjects need a pleasing arrangement

- Backgrounds usually aren't simple

- The challenge is to select and arrange complimentary, beautiful subjects
  - In a coherent manner
  - That tells the viewer where to look
  - And moves them through the image

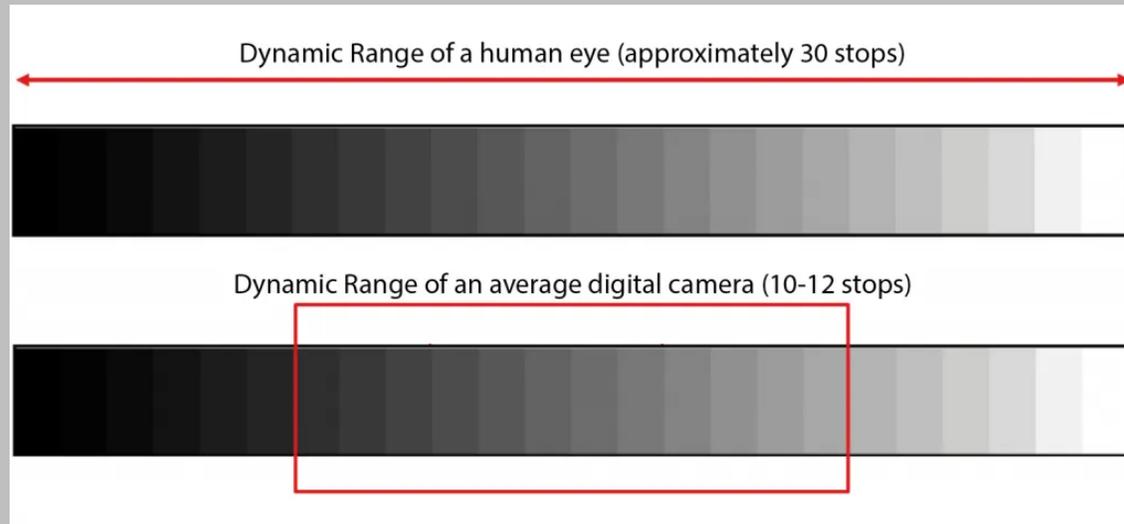
The Gilkey Glacier, Remote Alaska
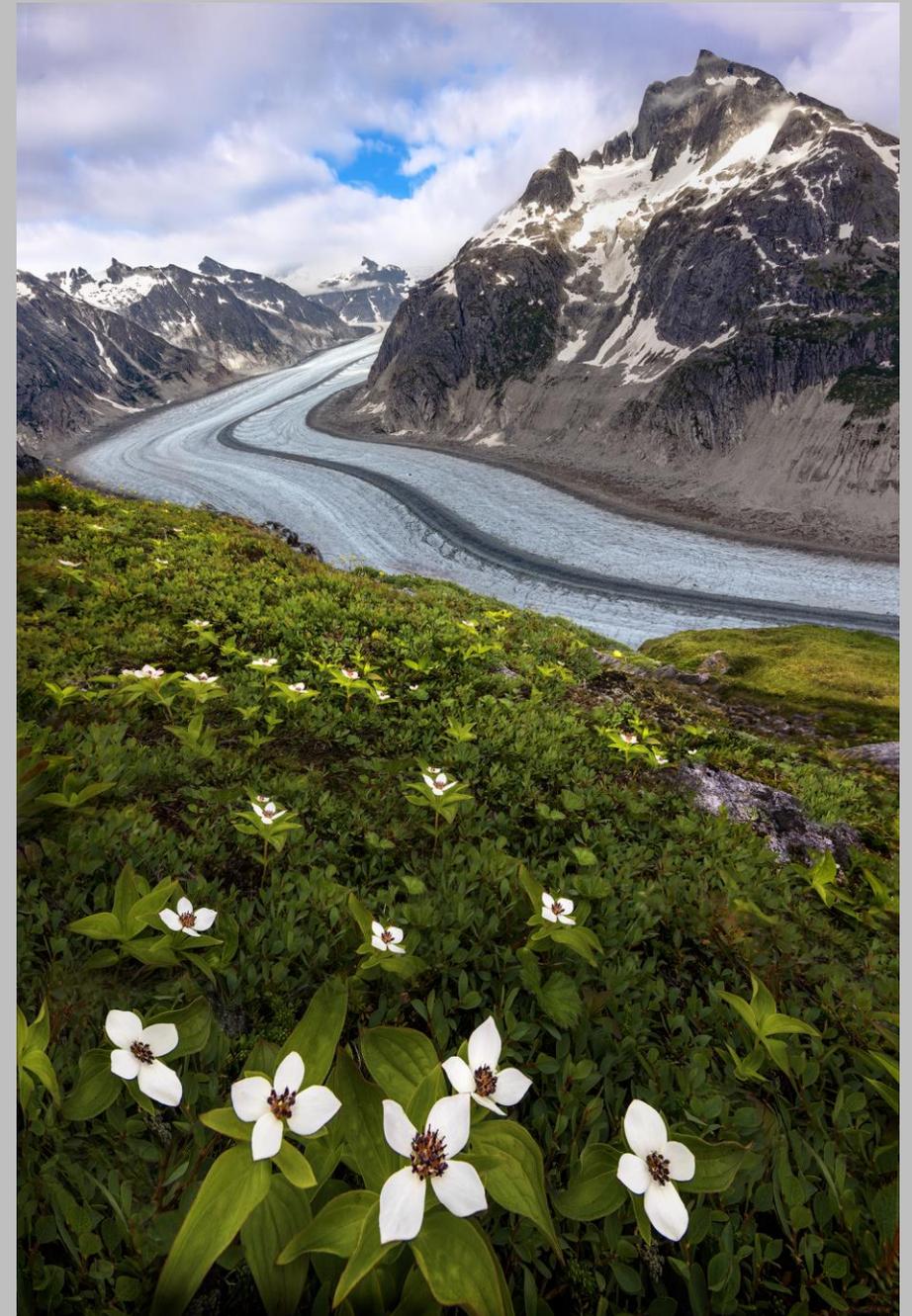
Death Valley NP, California

The Camera Versus Our Eyes

1. Limited dynamic range (only half!)

Dynamic Range of a human eye (approximately 30 stops)

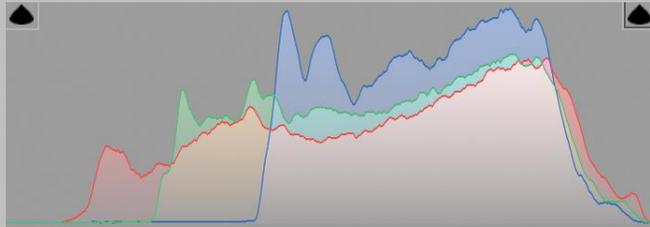Dynamic Range of an average digital camera (10-12 stops)

2. A lack of motion

Modest Dynamic Range Is Easy

- The histogram is helpful; everything fits

- The image on the LCD review screen looks wonderful

- There are no "blinkies" and no inky blacks

- Post processing is fast

Banff National Park, Canadian Rockies

High Dynamic Range Is Commonplace

- A brighter exposure will show a beautiful foreground with a totally blown out sky OR

- A darker exposure will show a beautiful sky with a nearly black foreground

Don Smith: "Expose For The Highlights And Process For The Shadows"

- You can recover about three stops of usable dynamic range in the shadows in your RAW processor

- Many high dynamic range shots can be captured with a single exposure by ignoring the histogram and exposing so the only highlights you want blown out are blown out

- Adjust (usually reduce) the exposure until the only blown highlights are the ones you want, such as the sun or a small area around the sun

- Tip: if your LCD screen review image looks terrible, it's a perfect exposure (and if it looks good, you're overexposed)!

LCD Review Screen View of Correct Exposure of a High Dynamic Range Situation

*Buttermilk Hills near Bishop, California*

Yet More Camera Dynamic Range

- Learn to use to use linear profiles
  - Adobe profiles (Adobe Color, for example) remove 1-3 stops of shadow and highlight dynamic range
  - Linear profiles allow access to an additional 1-3 stops of DR
  - Tony Kyper has camera specific linear profiles available for download and an easy-to-understand explanation at Linear Profile Repository (goodlight.us)
  - Mark Metternich walks you through creating your own linear profiles at https://youtu.be/q9JKkIU__bo?si=_cehg4r3E1gPGn0i

Motion

- Motion allows us to understand spatial relationships and depth

- In a 2-D image, it's difficult to grasp what's nearby and what's far away

- Without clues about depth, viewers are confused and lose interest

- Creating depth in high detail places like forests is very difficult (chaos)

- Creating depth in low detail places like a desert is much easier

From TikTok; through the pnw

Hoh Rainforest,
Washington
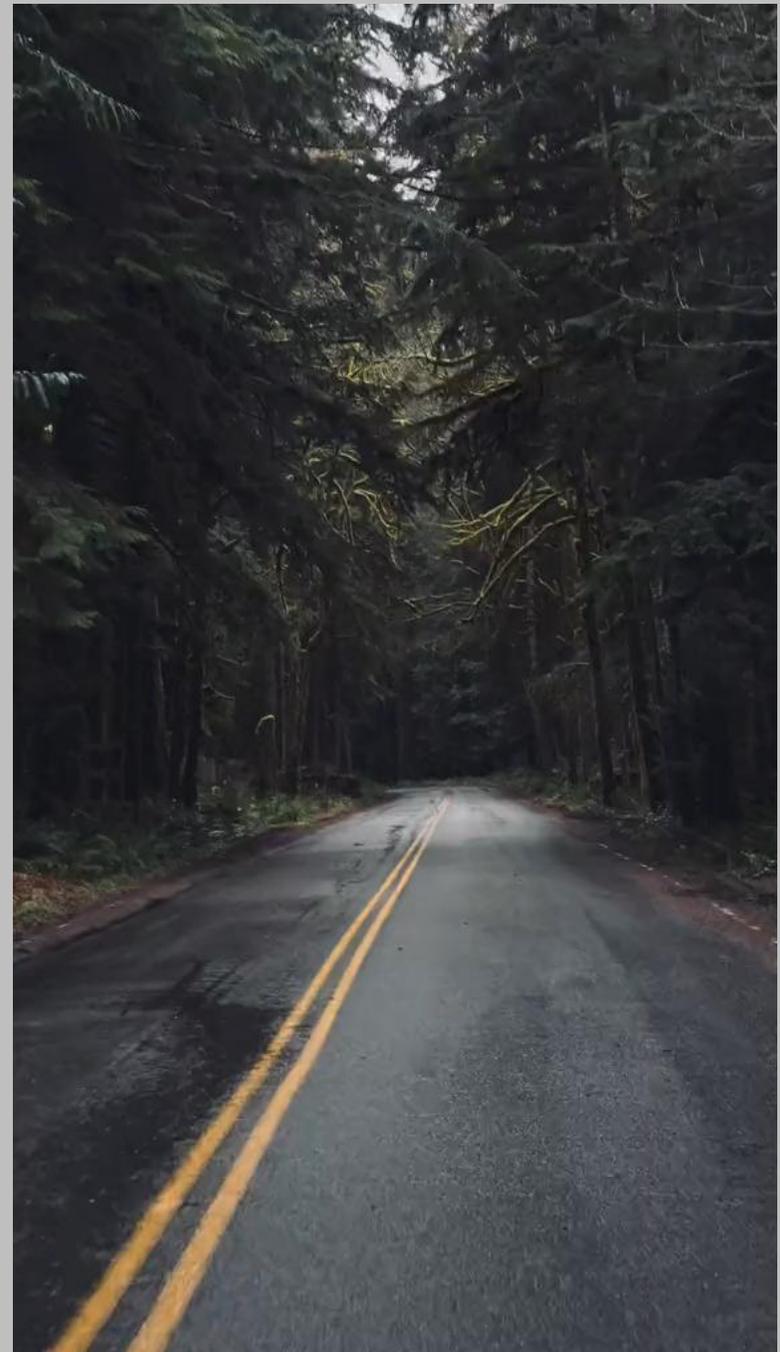
Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, Michigan

Overcoming a Lack of Motion

- Consider using one of three basic structures to create depth:
  - **Leading lines** that move the eye from near to far
  - **Framing** to surround the main subject that's further away
  - **Layers** that create a receding pathway to the main subject
- These basic structures help your viewer know where to look and how to move through the image
- When I'm in the field looking for a composition, I'm thinking "What is my structure?"

Ibex Dunes,
Death Valley NP

Dietrich River, Alaska

Hot Creek,
Mammoth Creek,
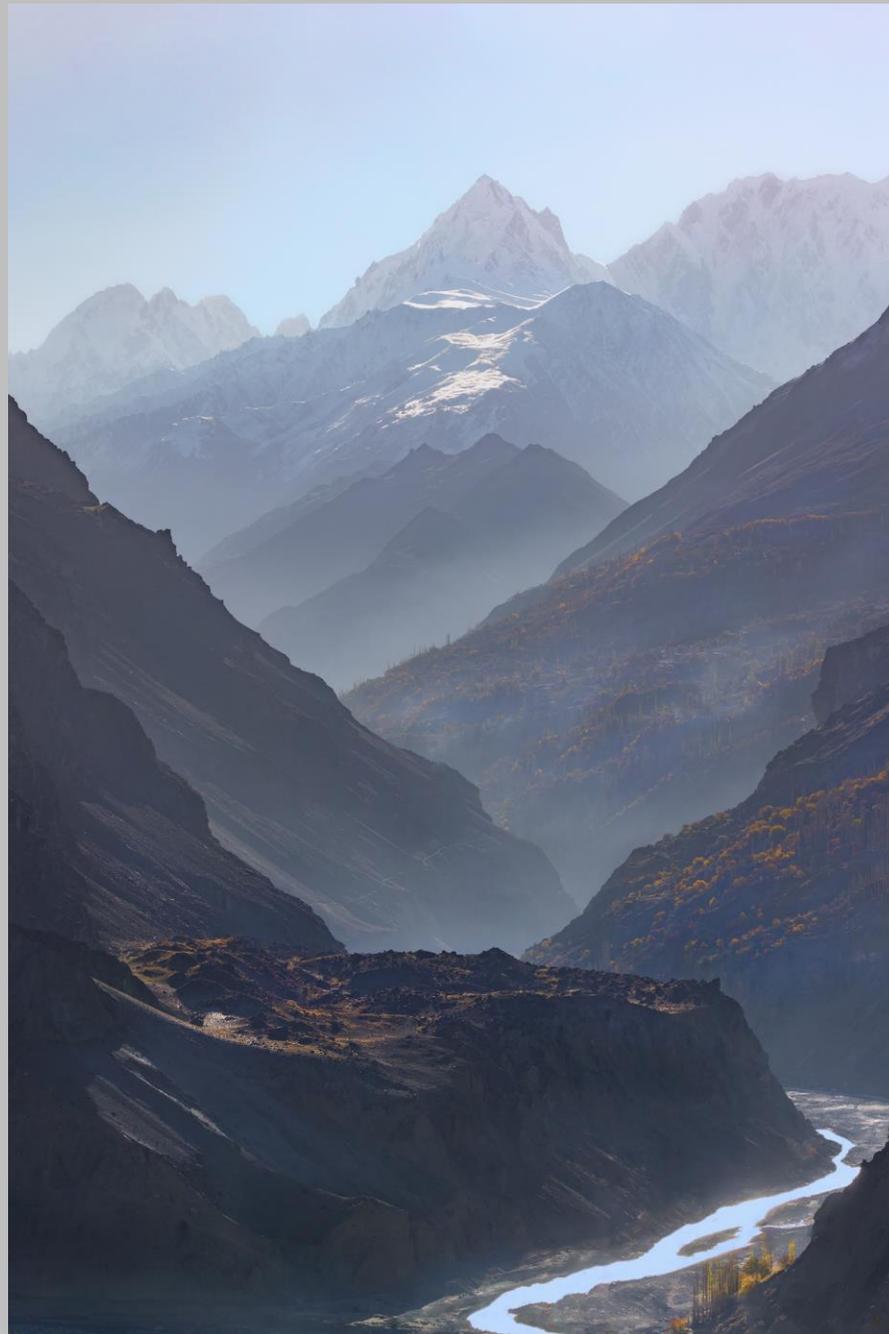*California*

Livengood, Alaska

Ladyfinger Viewpoint, Hunza Valley, Pakistan

Grand Island Sea Cave, Munising, Michigan

Mesquite Dunes,
Death Valley NP

Hunza Valley, Pakistan

*Glacier NP,
West Glacier,
Montana*

How Do You Create Additional Depth?

- ***First, tell your viewer where the sunlight is coming from***

- Light from within the frame is clearly directional

- If light is coming from the side, make that side clearly brighter so it's directional

- Light from behind creates problematic multiple harsh distracting shadows

Tombstone NP, Yukon Territory, Canada

Creating Directional Light

- If your image is equally bright on both sides, your eye is stuck in the middle

- Dodge (lighten)/glow on one side and burn (darken) the other side

- Especially important in telephoto images

- Check out Ryan Dyar

Mount Fitz Roy, Argentinian Patagonia

Add More Space On The Side of the Light

- Move your focal point slightly away from the side the light is coming from

- Give the light more space to flood into the scene

*Bisti Badlands
New Mexico*

Next, Add Depth With *Transitions*

- Big to small

- Dark to light

- Blacks to grays (level of blacks)

- Saturated to less saturated

- Cool to warm

- Contrasty to flat

- Sharp to indistinct

- Out of focus to in focus

Big Dick Canyon, Kofa Wildlife Preserve, Arizona
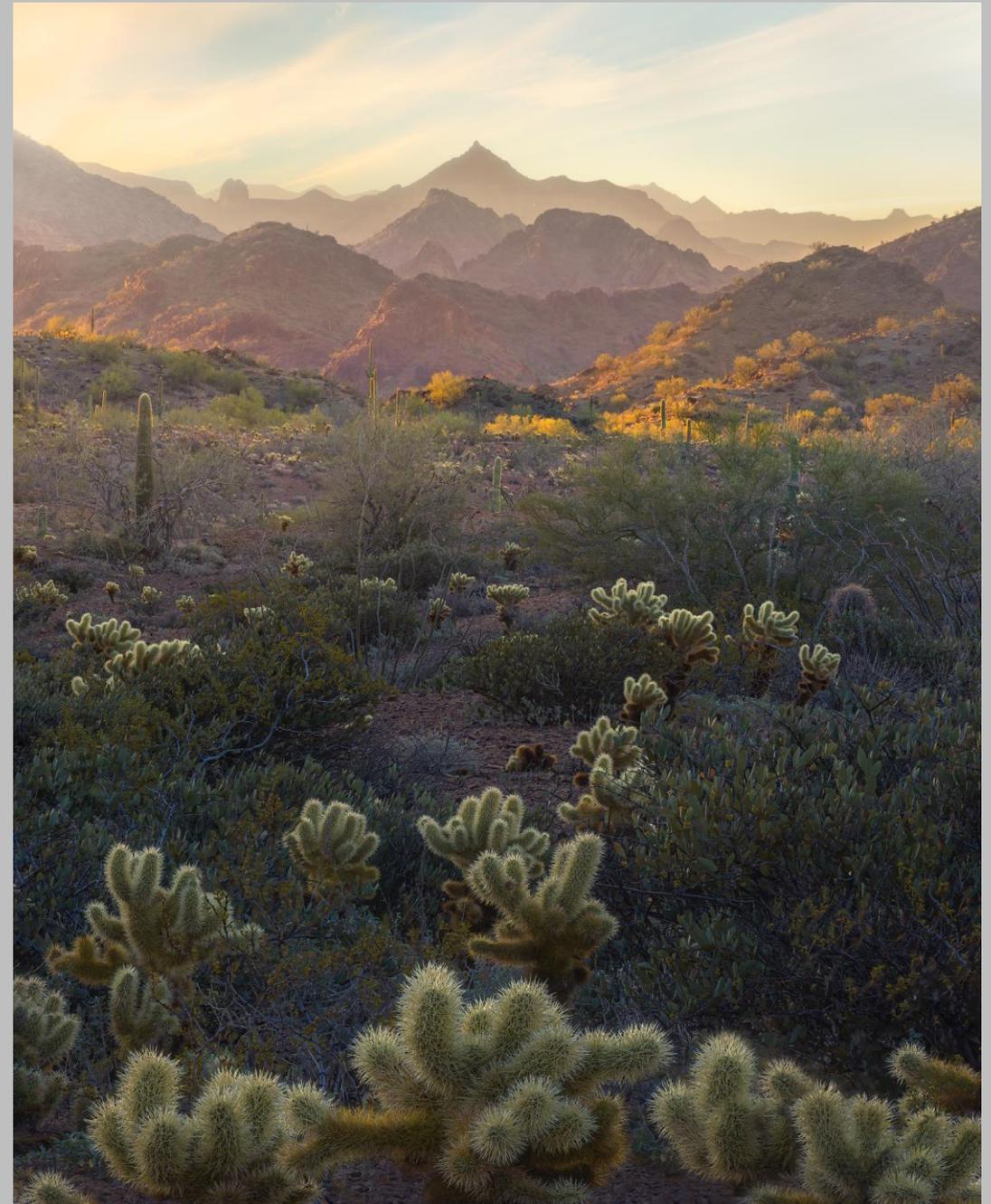
Structure?
Light source?
Transitions?

*Bernal Glacier,
Chile's Patagonia
Fjords*

Structure?
Light source?
Transitions?

Ice Cave,
Sutton, Alaska

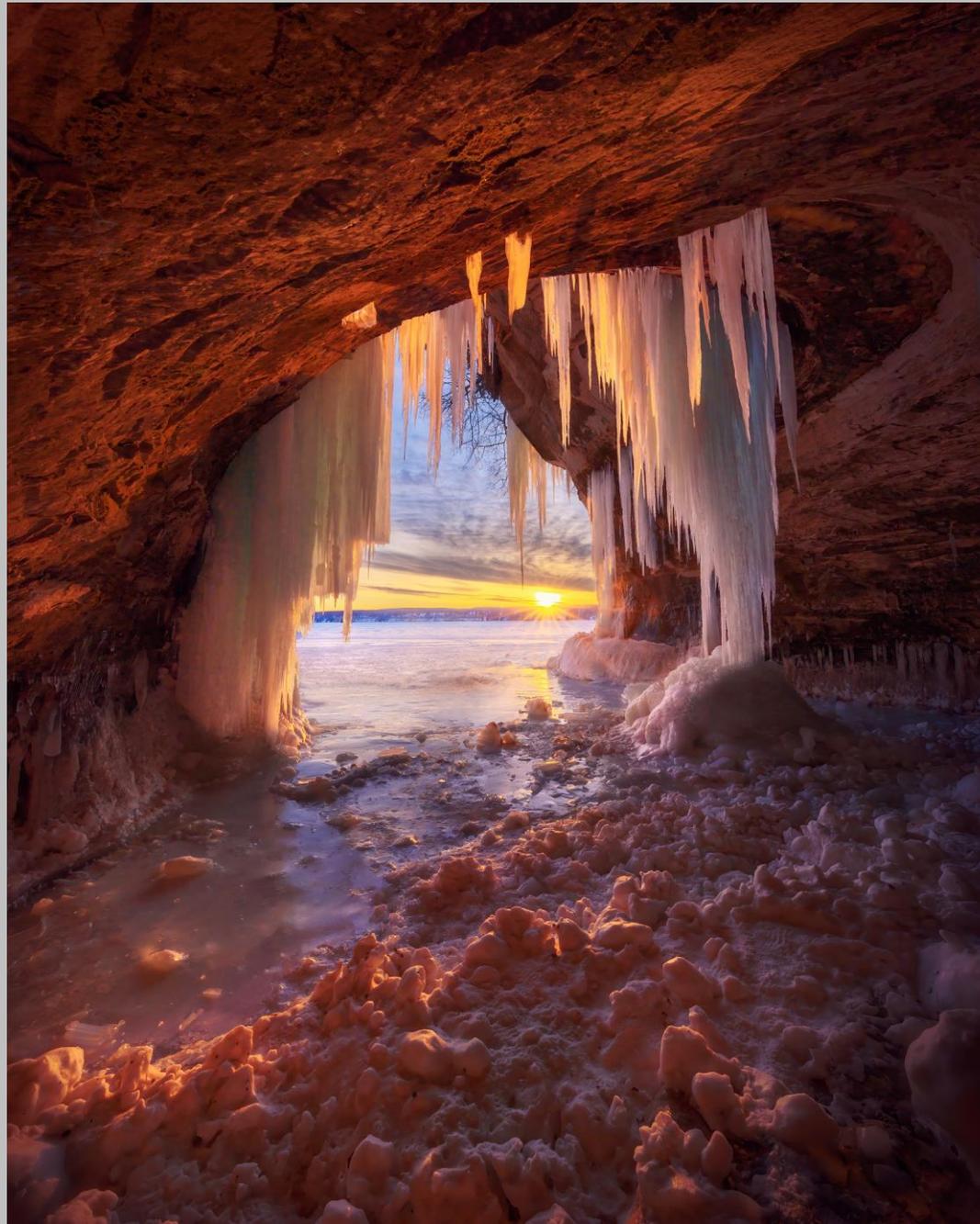Structure?
Light source?
Transitions?

Kofa Wildlife Preserve, Arizona

Structure?
Light source?
Transitions?

*Spray Lake,
Kananaskis Country,
Alberta, Canada*

Structure?
Light source?
Transitions?

*Ice Cave,
Munising,
Michigan*

Structure?
Light source?
Transitions?

Aguereberry Point,
Death Valley NP,
California

Tools to Use in the Field

- Subject separation

- Check your sixths

- Odds (and thirds)

- Border patrol

- Graph of light

- Wide angle 45° tool

- When to focus stack

Gilkey Glacier, Alaska

Obvious Spacing Between Primary Subjects

- Overlapping subjects create tension

- Clearly separate primary subjects so they are not touching or intertwined (relieves tension)

- Fog or haze can separate overlapping subjects

Atlantic Coast, Florida

38

Checking Sixths

- A field evaluation tool

- Divide your image into sixths

- Does each sixth add (or at least not detract from) the composition

- If not, recompose

White Pocket, Arizona

Odds

- Two or four subjects of similar interest create competition and tension unless they compliment each other

- Odd numbers more easily move the eye

- Thirds are good!

White Pocket, Arizona

Dealing With Even Numbers

- If you have two or four competing subjects of equal size, add another focal point

- Use the sun, the moon, or a foreground subject to create an odd number

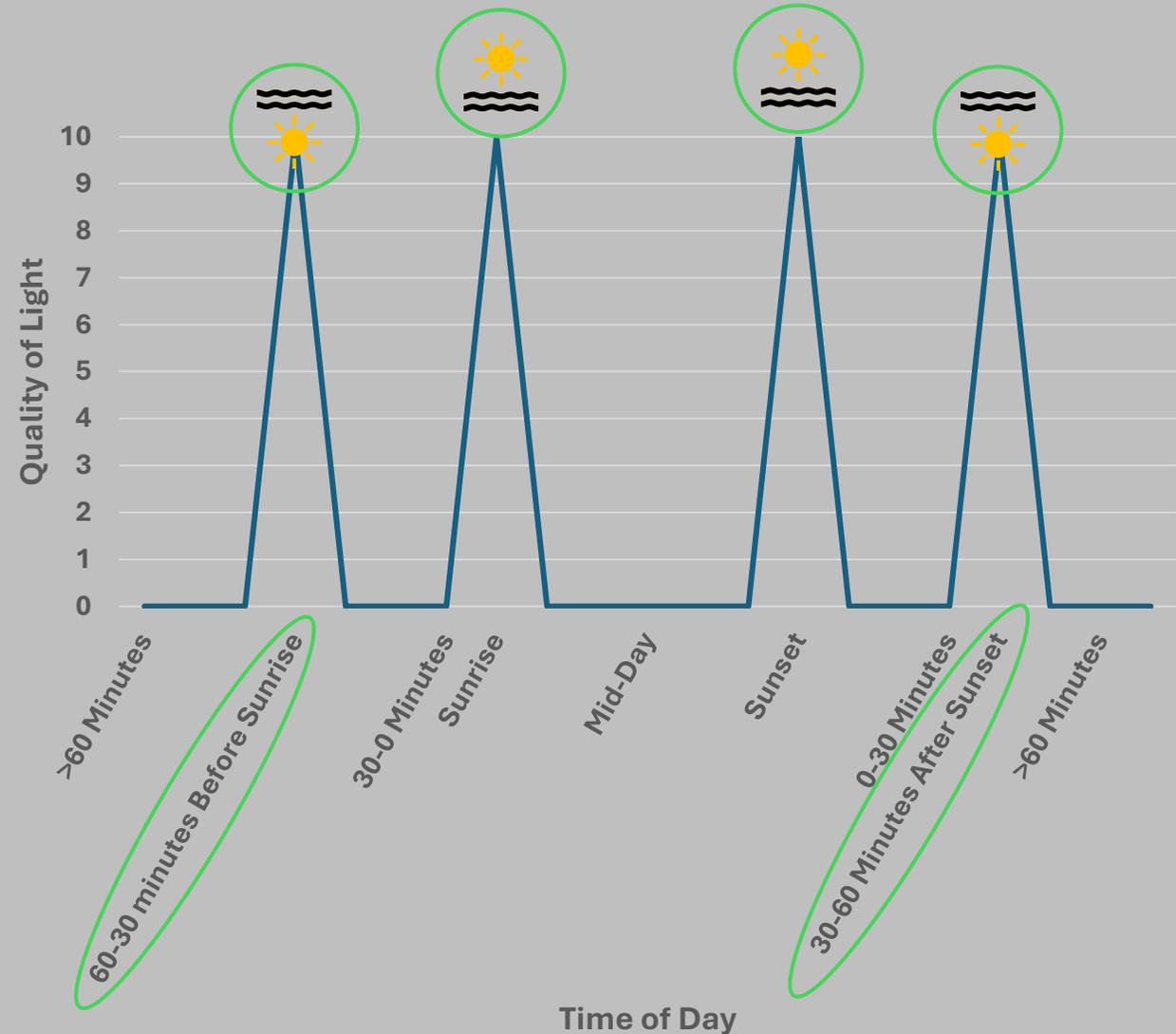*Torres del Paine, Chilian Patagonia*

Border Patrol

- Picture frames exist for a reason

- Make sure there are no distractions on the borders leading the eye out of the frame

- If something is going out of the frame, remove it in post or include a transition to lead the eye back in

Hennessey, Oklahoma

Graph of Light

- When shooting mountains, clouds, or any subject far above you, there are two peak times to capture light and color

- Sunrise/sunset and 30-60 minutes before sunrise and after sunset

- Pre-dawn and post-sunset light is soft and glowing

Quality of Light

10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
0

>60 Minutes | 60-30 minutes Before Sunrise | 30-0 Minutes Sunrise | Mid-Day | Sunset | 0-30 Minutes | 30-60 Minutes After Sunset | >60 Minutes

Time of Day

Eastern Sierra Mountains near Big Pine, California

Get Lower With Your Wide Angle

1. Estimate the width in inches of your interesting foreground

2. Your camera (held level) should be that number of inches above and behind your foreground

3. Example: 24-inch foreground means your camera is 24 inches above and 24 inches behind the foreground (45º)

4. Creates perfect big to small

Badlands NP, South Dakota

When Do I Need
To Focus Stack?

- Take the lens focal length and substitute inches for mm

- Multiply the inches by two

- That's the closest you can get to your subject without focus stacking

- Example: 15mm lens is 15 inches times 2 is 30 inches- the closest you can get without focus stacking
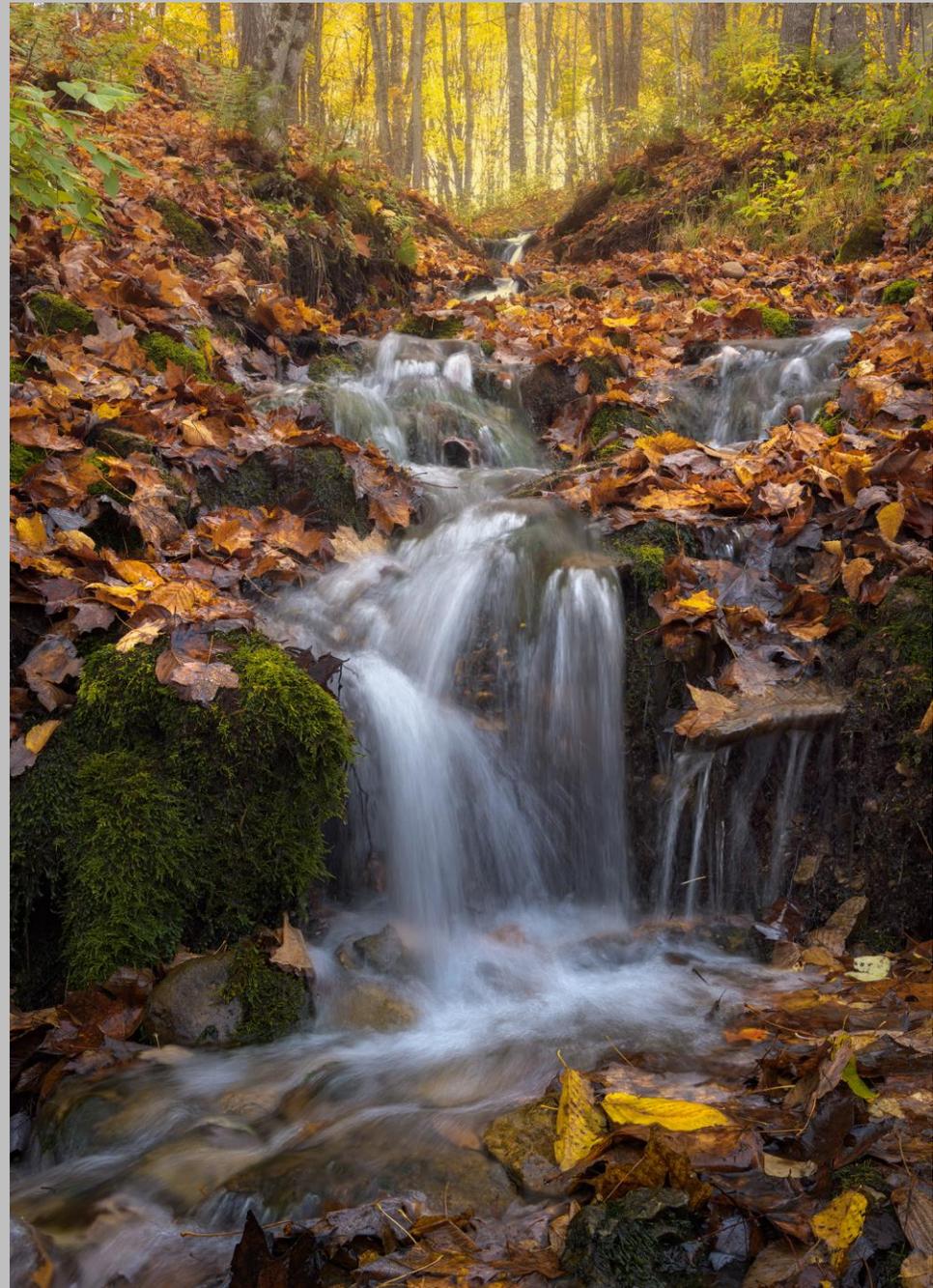
Pictured Rocks, NL, Michigan

"Very few photographs are perfect straight from the camera, but they can still be transformed into good pictures...Photoshop removes the total reliance on the camera. If we embrace it, it gives us the freedom to create like painters."

David Osborn, The Luminous Landscape

Coyote Gulch, Utah

Processing Approach

- Identify zones that require different processing approaches
- Create a copy of the image with an exaggerated light source or transition and paint it in using a mask with a soft brush
- Examples:
    - A darker/lighter layer or a dodge/burn layer
    - An atmosphere layer to create depth (level of blacks)
    - A warm or cool layer
    - A saturated or desaturated layer
    - A blurred layer and/or a negative dehaze layer
    - A combination layer (a cool, dark, blurred layer to vignette)
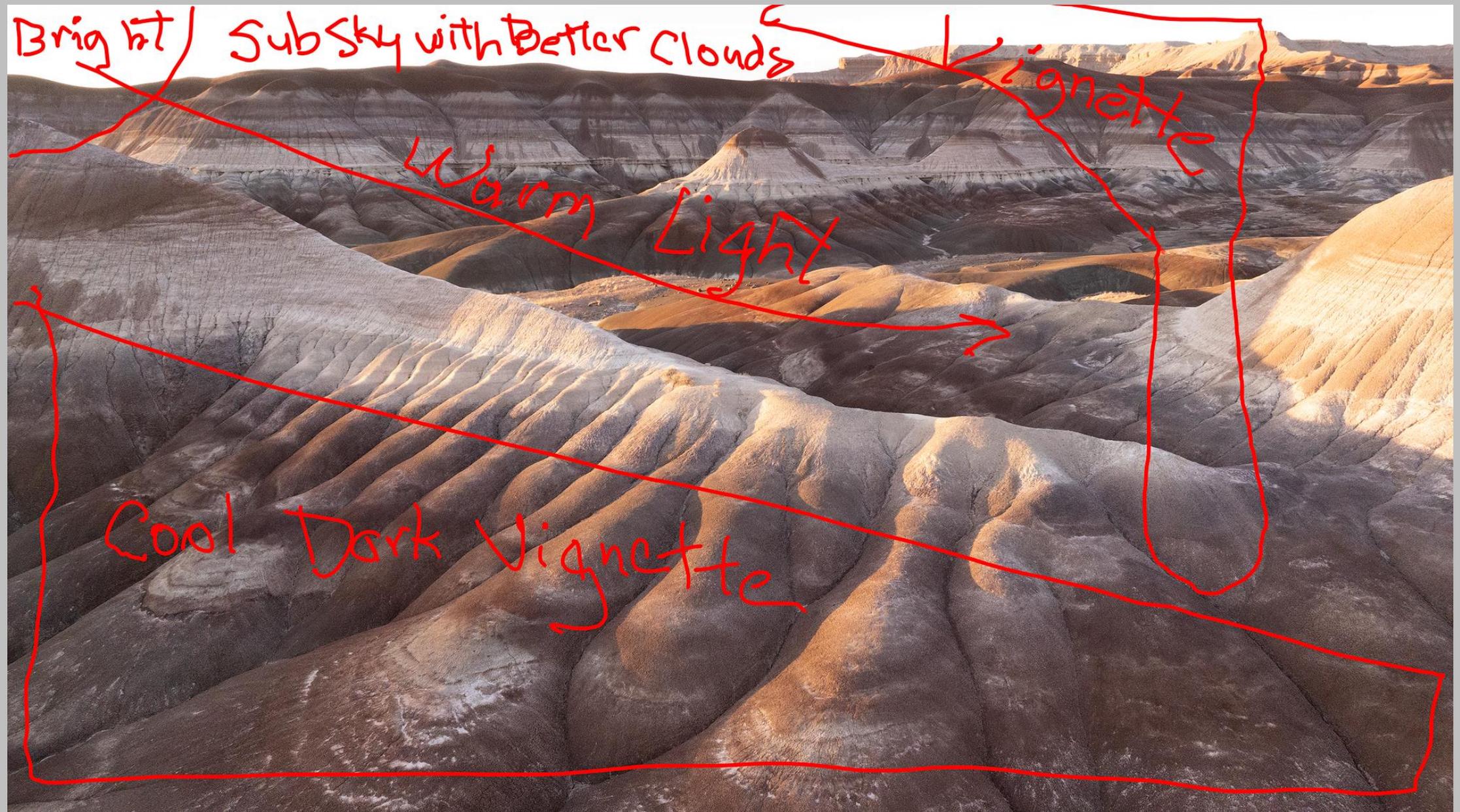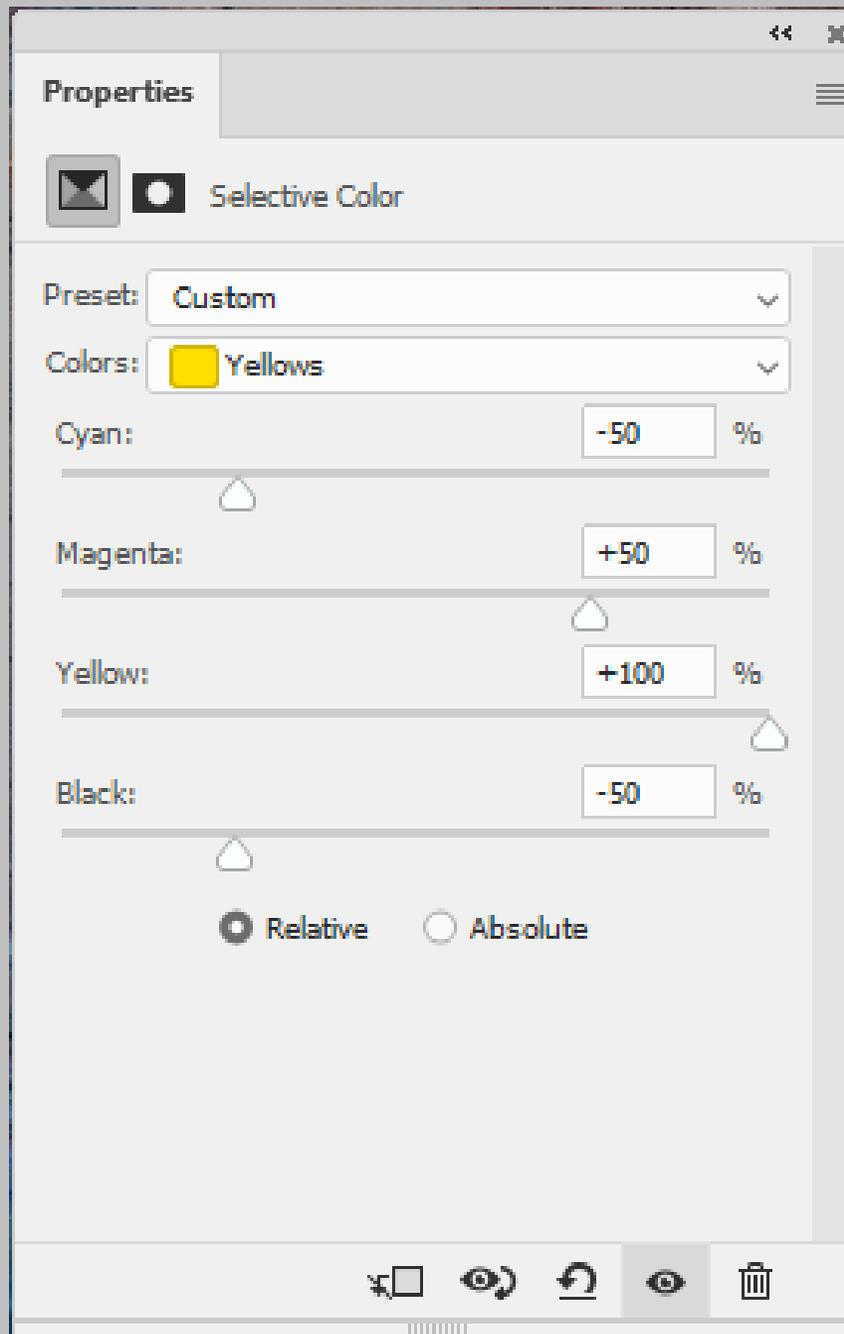
Painted Desert, Utah

Zone 1 Sky

Zone 2 Land

Border
Patrol

53

Bright / Sub Sky with Better Clouds

Vignette

Warm Light

Cool Dark Vignette

54

*Sierra Nevada
Mountains,
California*

References

- Favorite Photographers
  - Marc Adamus Marc Adamus Photography
  - Mark Metternich GALLERY – markmetternich
  - Don Smith Landscapes - Don Smith Photography
  - Gary Hart Galleries (garyhartphotography.com)
  - Ian Plant Artist's Select - IAN PLANT
- Processing Videos
  - A Study of Plane Separation | Ryan Dyar

I Hope You...

- Practice exposing for the highlights and processing for the shadows in high dynamic range situations

- Think leading lines, framing, and layers (and big to small)

- Apply subject separation, checking sixths, odds, border patrol, the graph of light, the 45-degree tool, and focus stacking

- Practice, practice, and practice post processing to enhance transitions including dark to light, level of blacks, saturated to less saturated, cool to warm, contrasty to flat, and sharp to indistinct

Sarfaranga Cold Desert, Pakistan

Thank You

Hovland Woods SNA, East Cook, Minnesota