

Northwest Exposure 2009

WTA's sixth annual photo contest award winners

The peaks couldn't be more beautiful, all jagged and icy. The sky is intense, with deep purple clouds gathering on the horizon as an amber-orange-red sun sets behind the next ridge over. What's that, a mountain goat and her kid just cresting the ridge?

Happily, your camera is ready around your neck and you snap away. Back home, however, none of the pictures have turned out as you'd hoped. What was an awe-inspiring mountain moment looks like any other day in the great outdoors.

Don't worry. We've all been there. Shooting outdoors is not easy.

That's what makes the following photographs so noteworthy. These photographers have captured stunning scenery in great light and in strong compositions. In this section, you will find all this year's winning images, a few more of our favorite shots, plus some helpful tips that should improve your photographic results no matter what camera you carry in your pack. Enjoy!

Contest Specs

Hikers submitted 763 photos to WTA's sixth annual photo contest. Our five official categories were Wilderness, Flora and Fauna, Hikers in Action, Young Photographers and Offbeat.

WTA staff member Kindra Ramos coordinated this contest. She was joined by Pam Roy, Don Geyer, Damien Murphy and Dave Schiefelbein, who are all fabulous photographers and generous contributors to WTA, to judge the entries and bring you the best of the best.

*Layout and design by Ann Rhodes of Rhodes-D-Signs
Photography tips by Wade Trenbeath.*



▲ **GRAND PRIZE •**
NORTHWEST EXPOSURE 2009
Lupine covered with morning dew.
Green Mountain Trail, Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest.
Misao Okada

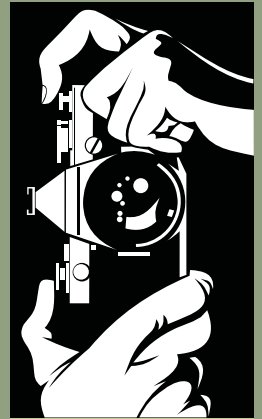


▲ **DESIGNER'S CHOICE** Mount Rainier in the sunshine and wind. Mount Rainier National Park. *Philip Westfall*



▲ **FIRST PRIZE • WILDERNESS LANDSCAPES**
 Crystalline Kulshan, a new take on a classic beauty.
 Park Butte Trail, Mount Baker Wilderness.
 Deborah Richardson

▼ **SECOND PRIZE • WILDERNESS LANDSCAPES**
 Just before dawn.
 Sahale Arm, North Cascades National Park.
 John D'Onofrio



Start with Light

Light should always be your first consideration. As a general rule, early morning and the evening leading into sunset offer the best light for shooting outdoors. Get up early and save time to shoot in the evenings, too. Make some tea and wait for the first stars. Go ahead and shoot in the afternoon in order to document your journey, but remember that extremely bright light is difficult to shoot in and probably won't yield your "oohs and aahs" shots.

Don't rely on Photoshop magic later on. Real light is always prettier.





Hold It Steady

Setting your camera on a stable surface will allow you to take longer exposures with a timer or a remote release and will improve your results. The more you want to enlarge your prints, the sharper the original has to be. Use a bulb setting here so that you can hold your exposure for as long as you need. (Not all cameras will have these options, so look for these features if you are purchasing a new one.)

Carrying a tripod will do wonders for your photos, but it doesn't exactly fit into the "go light" mode of travel. Even an ultralight tripod will start to feel heavy on a long trip.

Many lightweight alternatives to tripods are available. The lightest versions are usually made to set on the ground or atop bigger objects afield. Some newer models can be fastened to limbs, rails, or other objects. Try to find a balance between what you're happy to carry and what safely works. Many beautiful shots have been taken with a camera set carefully on a rock or other available "nature-pod" for long exposures.

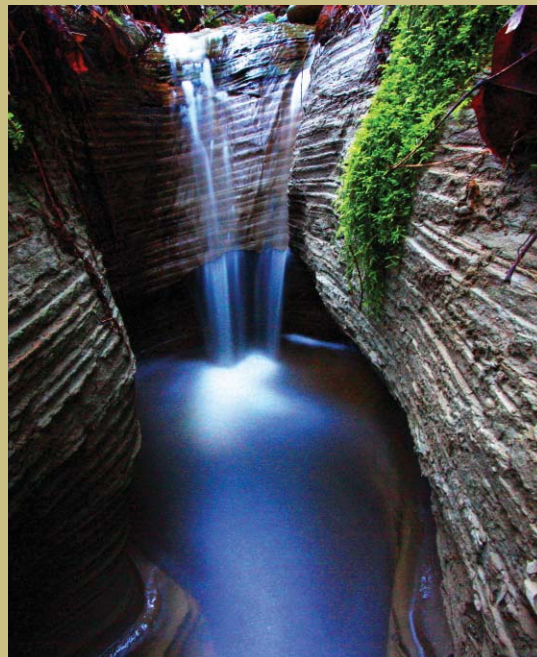


▲ FIRST PRIZE • FLORA AND FAUNA

Green heron and tadpole. Tadpole loses.
Juanita Bay Park. *Michael Myers*

▶ HONORABLE MENTION • HIKERS IN ACTION

Hiking in the wilderness. Bumping Lake.
Jeff Goulden



▲ WILDERNESS LANDSCAPE Slot Slough. Hoh Rain Forest. Olympic National Park. *Michael Myers*





◀ **FIRST PRIZE • HIKERS IN ACTION**

Hiker on Rattlesnake Ridge. Washington Department of Natural Resources. *Robb Mitchell*



▲ **FLORA AND FAUNA** Cheeky Steller's Jay. Rampart Ridge, Mount Rainier National Park. *L. Lisa Lawrence*

▼ **SECOND PRIZE • HIKERS IN ACTION**

Hiker's reward: sunset from top of Spray Park. Mount Rainier National Park. *Andres Caldera*



Work the Flash

Portraiture outdoors is another difficult endeavor. Faces in the foreground of a picture are often lit differently (less or more) than the beautiful backdrop you want to include in the image. A bright background can fool the camera's automatic functions. This can result in a flat, boring photo if it averages the two exposures or a silhouetting problem if it just chooses one zone of exposure. You may end up with happy, healthy friends but no imposing peaks in the background or a background of clear, sharp peaks with just silhouettes for friends.

Try your camera's forced flash-on setting if you're getting the silhouetted friends. This technique works well when the sunset or sunrise is lighting the mountains or trees much more intensely than your friends.

Flashes aren't just for dark days and places. Using your flash even when the sun is bright and everything seems well lit can add depth and highlights to your fellow hikers' faces and put a sparkle in their eyes. Don't have a flash? Try using your flashlights or headlamps. Bright white LED headlamps can work well for lighting up a face or making the tent more interesting for those evening camp shots.





Experiment with Exposures

If you have time, take a series of different exposures.

As you try different exposures, cameras will see colors you didn't know were there. Remember, a stable shooting surface is the key to increasing your chance of good results.



▶ SECOND PRIZE • YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHERS

A wild mountain goat looks into the rising sun. The Enchantments, Wenatchee National Forest. *Justin Collins*



▼ FIRST PRIZE • OFFBEAT "Norwegian snake." North Coast, Olympic National Park. *Ken Donleycott*

▼ SECOND PRIZE • OFFBEAT Snake in the hole. Rattlesnake Ledge. *Michael Myers*



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◀ **FIRST PRIZE
YOUTH PHOTOGRAPHERS**

Ground-nesting bird. Mukilteo Beach.
Catherine Straume

▼ **FLORA AND FAUNA**

Panic. Skagit Valley Wildlife Area,
Fir Island Farms Reserve Unit. *Mark Kiver*



▼ **SECOND PRIZE • FLORA AND FAUNA**

Western pasque flower, flaunting her stylish fall hairdo. Wonderland Trail, Mount Rainier National Park. *Jason Hummel*



**Washington's
Most Photogenic
Wild Places**

These scenic locales show up among our photo contest entries every year, and they're so darn pretty, they often win.

Perfection Lake

Take your pick between this lake and any of the myriad pools that dot the Enchantments. Shooting pictures in this central Cascades hideaway is as about as close to shooting fish in a barrel as photography gets.

Mount Shuksan

If you're going for the classic shot, put Lake Ann in the foreground and make sure the peak is dusted with snow.

Yellow Aster Butte

Abundant huckleberries give these meadows north of Mount Baker a brilliant red cast in autumn.

Sahale Arm

No detail shots here, just big panoramas bursting with the alpine grandeur of the North Cascades.

Shi Shi Beach

The Olympic Coast offers endless photographic opportunities. The classic shot here is sunset at low tide with backlit sea stacks.

Palouse Falls

Southeastern Washington's most majestic waterfall draws photographers hoping to catch its milky waters in just the right light.