

Behind the Shot: Sky Rock Overlook

Download as a desktop background at www.lenspiration.com/wallpapers

The Shoot to Serve assignment, [Woman Worshipping God](#), had been on my radar for several weeks...

Problem is, I don't live near any epic overlooks or "perfect" locations that the assignment demanded. Yes, I live in the "Mountain State", but the mountains here not the kind of mountains Margret is looking for in the cover of her book. Nor could I find any of the kind of "rough paths" that she was looking for near an overlook near my home. I know of a dozen places *not* close to home that would work...easy...but none nearby.

So this meant I needed to do some scouting to find a place that I could at least *try* to make work.

I wish I could say I had all the time in the world to drive around and find cool places

to photograph. But I don't. So I try to fit it in by checking with locals to see if they know of any places that would match what I am looking for, and by getting up early and scouting around before work days begin.

One photographer friend referred me to Dorsey's Knob. Not the most epic place in the world, he said, but it would be worth checking out.

So I looked it up. It was in Morgantown, only about an hour's drive from my house.

A week or so later, it happened that a friend needed a ride up the Pittsburg airport. The return trip would bring me right through Morgantown...right at sunrise.

So, I volunteered to join the airport run!

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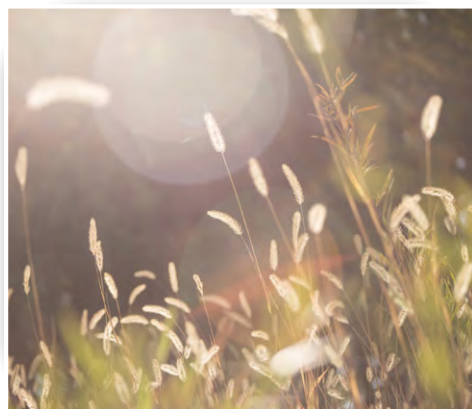
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What's New In Shoot to Serve

COMPLETED: *Glowing Sunlight*

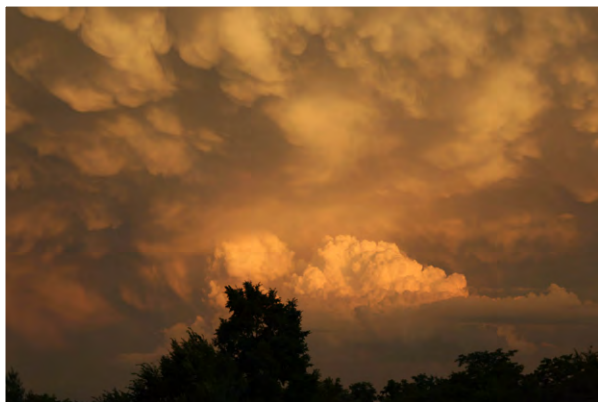
www.lenspiration.com/glowing-sunlight



When the Family Conferences requested a PowerPoint background for the hymn, Christ Liveth in Me, I thought it was the perfect opportunity to learn and practice shooting what I like to call the “Glowy Effect”. After not being able to find any training videos that fit the Lenspiration wholesomeness policy, I went ahead and put one together myself. More on that in the article below, [The Glowy Effect: Artistically Harnessing Lens Flare](#) (p5).

COMPLETED: *Majesty Supreme*

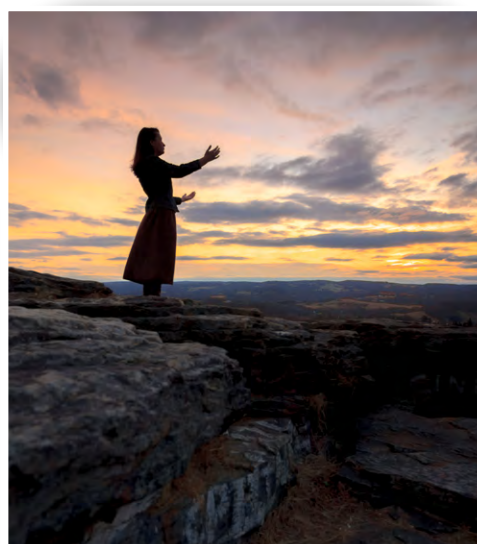
www.lenspiration.com/majesty-supreme



This high-participation assignment was amazing in multiple ways! First, there were so many good submissions made that it actually knocked out multiple requests from the Family Conferences, and second, the grand total of 16 submissions made for a full and concentrated Critique Webinar back in December! Boy, doesn't that feel like such a long time ago? Looking forward to what 2018 holds! New shooting assignments will continue to be posted at www.lenspiration.com/shoottoserve.

PENDING: *Woman Worshiping God*

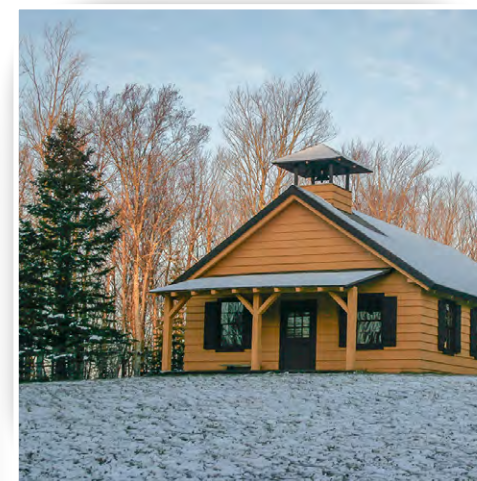
www.lenspiration.com/woman-worshiping-god



This has probably been the most challenging assignment that has been posted to date. And not just for you. Even I almost didn't shoot it! But I did...on the last day of the deadline. The photos are far from perfect and they'll require some Photoshopping on a similar degree of complexity as was needed in [Professionally Photoshopping Extra People Into a Photo](#) (p10), but I'll share more about that during the Critique Webinar on January 16 (www.lenspiration.com/photo-critique-with-lenspiration-jan-16).

OPEN: *Old Schoolhouses in Winter*

<https://www.lenspiration.com/forums/topic/old-schoolhouse-winter/>



For the covers of winter editions, The Old Schoolhouse Magazine is looking to us to provide them with pictures of old, one-room schoolhouses in wintry surroundings. Deadline is March 31 so we can shoot at our leisure during the winter months. When shooting snow-filled scenes, you might want to keep in mind the concept explained in [Ever Thought About Comparative Brightness?](#) (p12).

OPEN: *Shooting Into The Sun*

www.lenspiration.com/shooting-into-sun



The next request by Family Conferences is for a picture to backdrop the hymn, Glory To His Name. We're looking for pictures of brilliant sunrises or sunsets, or golden-hour scenes with the sun still shining bright above the horizon. When direct sunlight creates unwanted sunflare, use the technique for removing it as explained at the end of [Photographing an Enchanted Sunset](#) (p6). The deadline is January 13, and the winning photo will be announced on January 16, during the Critique Webinar (www.lenspiration.com/photo-critique-with-lenspiration-jan-16).

THE GLOWY EFFECT

ARTISTICALLY HARNESSING LENS FLARE

Have you ever wondered how some folks are able to capture a glowing and dreamy effect in their photos?

Capturing this neat effect is actually quite simple. Here are the 3 things to keep in mind:

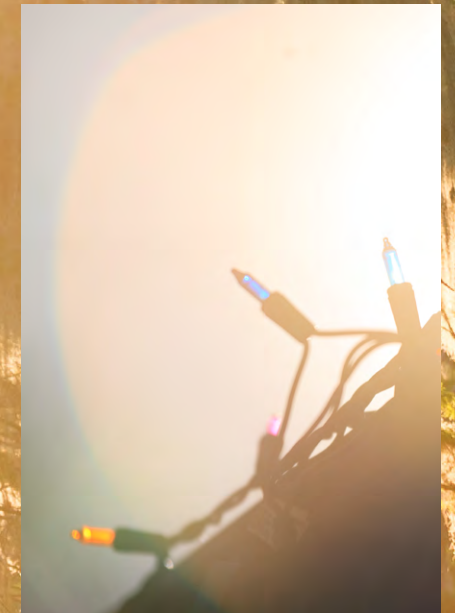
1. Use a telephoto lens
2. Stop down to a very wide aperture
3. Shoot toward a direct light source

Wide angle lenses don't work as well because they usually render lens flare as smaller spots across the frame.

The further you zoom in, the more those lens flares will be magnified to cover more of the frame, thus creating that hazy and low-contrast "glowy" effect over more and more of your image.

Using wider apertures (like f/4 or f/2.8) helps too. The plane of focus is shallower, making distant sources of light appear bigger and softer.

Expose for the subject you're shooting. Let the background highlights blow out. Include as much light as you want! It's all part of capturing the "glowy effect". ♦



www.lenspiration.com/the-glowy-effect

Photographing an Enchanted Sunset

www.lenspiration.com/mm-enchanted-rock

After watching the related video, here are some further insights to help summarize what I am glad I did (or things I wish I would have done) to really make the most of that short little visit to Enchanted Rock State Natural Area:

- I made plans ahead of time to spend an entire extra day after the wedding to rest up, pack up, chill out, edit pictures, explore the area....you know, whatever happened to suit my fancy.
- That one day flew by way too quickly! I wish I'd either scheduled more time or had been more specific in planning that day to not waste as much of it as I did.
- Enchanted Rock was a no-brainer location to visit because it was what everyone in the area recommended, both photographers and non-photographers.
- I brought a ton of camera gear to shoot the wedding but condensed it down to only the landscape-related things needed for a little sunset shoot.
- There were so many clouds as we neared the park that I thought the 45-minute drive wasn't going to be worth it! But you can't never always sometimes tell!
- The entrance fee was so expensive, I wish I had been able to spend more time there, like gone camping or something. \$7/person for just a few hours? Wow.
- Set all clocks to the current time zone :)
- My first priority was to find the perfect sunset spot where I would go if the sun peeked through the clouds before it set below the horizon. This scouting phase is often the most enjoyable part of a landscape photography shoot because it's exploratory and you discover all the amazing things that are around. I always take pictures while I'm scouting around, but I usually don't spend too much time on my shots or expect them to be very amazing.

- After scouting out the whole general area, I settled on the spot I'd go to if there was a nice sunset, and then spent the remaining amount of time having fun, experimenting and playing around with the camera.

- Of course, there should always be time to spend time with the folks you're exploring with, to chat and do non-photography-related things. That waiting period is usually the best time to do this.

- When sunset came, I photographed the final composition twice using the exact same exposure only shooting the second image with my finger blocking the sun. This allows me to merge the two photo in post processing to remove the glare. ♦





EXPLORE: Enchanted Rock State Natural Area, TX

View all locations at www.lenspiration.com/mappro

GPS: 30.505738, -98.818409
Rating: 4

Description: Enchanted Rock is a unique geologic feature. A large, bald rock protruding from the bushy, Texas hill country landscape. Great landscape photography is possible from just about anywhere in the park, but the views are vast and uninterrupted from the top, 425 feet from the surrounding plain. I have only really taken pictures from on the rock.

Accessibility: Moderate. Drive in at the park entrance (30.495216, -98.819983), and from any of the parking areas, the hike up to or around Enchanted Rock are marked. I was here in July and there weren't too many people around, though I hear it can get very congested. It can't be much more than a mile to the top. It's all uphill and relatively rough as it meanders up through the rocks at the foot of the hill and eventually disappears as you start climbing the rock itself. There's no one real trail that takes you to the top; just walk "up".

Surroundings: Interesting rock formations worth photographing all over the place on the way up. Once you're up on the rock, there are random pools of water that I found very shapely and interesting to photograph. Grass and plants grow around these pools. Random bunches of prickly pear grow all over the place, but otherwise, it's barren rock. Views stretch out in all directions, though a 360 view is difficult because the rock is so large and there's no real apex. The horizon is relatively flat and nothing much to photograph in the distance other than "vastness".

Time of Day: Golden hour is amazing. Nothing but clouds obstruct the light. Park opens late in the day so sunrise may not be possible unless you're camping. Park closes at dusk so sunset here is possible.

Time of Year: I would assume this place looks pretty much the same throughout the year. Not cold enough for reliable snow. No showy fall foliage. However, wild-

flower season should be great. Late February through mid April. Last weekend of March? Come May and June, the prickly pear should be blooming.

Pros: While there are lots of interesting geologic features in Texas hill country, this is a place you can freely explore without being on private property. A playground for adults. Lots of room for exploration. Unique rock formations. Nice views from the top of the rock. The rock itself is interesting to photograph too, from the base from the north side, I've heard.

Cons: I've heard can be very busy during spring break.

Restrictions: Opens after sunrise. Extremely expensive entrance fee (\$7/person when I was there) and camping. View website for details: <https://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/enchanted-rock/>

Other Notes: <https://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/enchanted-rock/>

Scouted By: James Staddon ♦

[Submit Your Own Locations Here!](#)



CRITIQUE HIGHLIGHTS: Leptospermum

Watch online at www.lenspiration.com/webinar121217, beginning at about 1 hour.



Photo by @creative-click-photography

- ❑ Taking pictures of tiny plants like this is no easy task! You get brownie points for just choosing it as your subject!
- ❑ When taking pictures of small plants, I tend to only include *portions* of in-focus plant at a time, filling the rest of the frame with out-of-focus content to keep the composition from looking too busy.
- ❑ Glad you're using a nice, wide aperture!
- ❑ Maximize bokeh by focusing at the lens' minimum focus distance.
- ❑ Perhaps increase bokeh by zooming in more than 50mm.
- ❑ Find and include patterns, symmetry, or unique shapes in the plant. These might help hold interest longer than just the "beauty factor" of the sheer flower.
- ❑ Edit to keep texture in pedals. ♦

TREND WATCH

The inside scoop on what buyers are looking for in stock photography!

Business Finance

- Groups of people making plans
- Closeups of financial things, like planners, forms, coins in a business environment
- Creative concepts that showcase spending less money or "going green"
- Bank scenarios, including ATMs
- Storefronts. ♦



Professionally Photoshopping Extra People Into a Photo

Ever wondered how to Photoshop extra people into a picture? It isn't easy. And there's a million different ways of going about doing it. But let me show you the techniques that I happened to use while fulfilling a recent project for a wedding client....

For their honeymoon, a couple whose wedding I had just shot went to visit relatives in South Korea. The relatives were very sad they had not been able to attend the wedding, so the couple asked if I would be able to Photoshop them into the big, family group picture! The job was relatively complex and took me about 2 hours.

However, you can watch it (using the link below) from beginning to end in just under 9 minutes! As you watch, take note of the following pointers:

- A vast majority of cutting out people is done with the Brush Tool. This is because the backgrounds are highly textured, and the subjects are not well separated from the background already.
- I'm utilizing a variety of textured brushes depending on what I'm cutting out. It's worth taking the time to learn how to create your own brushes.
- While brushing, I'm constantly changing brush Size ([and]) and Hardness (Shift + [and]) using keyboard shortcuts.
- All cutouts are made using masks.
- Since brushes are usually circular, hard corners or acute angles can be easily made by temporarily switching to the opposite swatch (X).
- I only remove blemishes and color

casts in an object after I have cut it out.

- Temporarily viewing a fresh cutout against a variety of different colored backgrounds helps you know if you've done a good job on the cutout.
- After a subject has been cut out from the source picture, the objects they are to be standing behind need to be cut out in the destination picture.
- If the added subject is too bright- or dark-looking for the picture they're being placed into, I just use Curves or Layers to create exaggerated adjustments with masks and then brush in at low opacity the areas that need adjusted.
- Along with matching brightness and color, remember to match sharpness.
- The destination photo was pre-edited, but not pre-cropped. This allowed me to re-crop and re-export from LR, like I did on this project.

www.lenspiration.com/photoshopping-people-in



BEFORE



AFTER



A photograph of a cave interior. A path leads into the distance, illuminated by a bright light source at the end of the path. The cave walls are rocky and layered. The title "Ever Thought About COMPARATIVE BRIGHTNESS?" is overlaid on the top left of the image.

Ever Thought About COMPARATIVE BRIGHTNESS?

Whether or not you consider yourself to be a photographer, I'm sure we've all taken pictures for special events like holidays, birthdays, parties, and weddings. Most of these events are usually inside, under indoor lighting.

Now, let's say you flip on all the lights to take a beautiful picture of the gloriously decorated Christmas dinner table, and I were to ask you.... "Is it dark in here?"

You'd probably say, "No".

And that's because your standard of "light measurement" is relative. Comparative. You've reached a conclusion based on comparison with a fluctuating standard.

The reality is, yes, it is very dark in the dining room....in the eyes of a camera. The amount of light emitted by the light bulbs above the table is actually, not really that much. And the blurry picture you'll probably take of the Christmas dinner table is proof of this fact.

You see, cameras do *not* have a fluctuating standard of light measurement. It doesn't have an eyeball that automatically adjusts to be more or less receptive to the amount of available light.

Instead of measuring light comparatively, the camera reads light consistently.

If there is a lot of light, the camera compensates with a faster shutter speed. As you decrease the amount of light, the camera will use slower and slower shutter speeds to compensate. This is why most pictures we take in the indoors are more apt to be blurry.

But thankfully, because the camera's light meter is consistent, we can rely on it to consistently take bright pictures regardless of how much light there is (to a point, of course).

The camera meter doesn't fluctuate, but our eyes do. Consider the amazing conclusions we draw because of our eyes' fluctuating standard....

www.sharpeningcharacter.com/sc-episode-102

We turn the lights off around the table, and we say "Wow, it's dark in here!", whereas the reality is that it is just "darker". Walk into a cave and turn off your flashlight and you'll experience true, actual "dark".

We step outside into the mid-afternoon sunlight on that Christmas Day and we say "It's bright out here!", whereas the reality is it's just "brighter". What is truly bright? Looking directly at the sun perhaps?

I don't exactly know what is true, complete, 100% "brightness", but regardless, the point is, what type of standard are we using to draw our conclusions?

Let's apply this to daily life.

We're used to using a fluctuating standard (ie. we step out into the

sunlight and conclude "it's bright", whereas the reality is it is just *comparatively* bright, not nearly as bright as the brightest thing that exists) so when we see a new movie released and we hear it's not nearly as bad as the previous one, we say, "Oh, that must mean it's good!", but the reality is, it's still a movie. What is it like in comparison with God, who is all goodness, perfection,

truth, and brightness?

This is drawing conclusions from a solid, fixed standard. Like the camera.

What if we were to use a consistent standard (ie. regardless of how bright we might think a room might be, the camera sees it at it's true brightness) when we learn about a new movie release. It doesn't matter how it compares with other movies, we just make our conclusions about whether it's good or bad based on what is God-like: true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report. Based on truth. Real truth. This is the standard God designed us to use to draw

our conclusions on anything in life.

It's amazing how easy it is to get locked up into drawing conclusions based on our surroundings, what

we hear other people say, what's popular, what's accepted, what's the newest thing. Let us instead desire to be wise in our decision making, basing things on God's perspective of truth in the Scriptures as our standard. That doesn't change. God doesn't change. What is right is right, and what is wrong is wrong. And God reveals that to us in his Word. Let us stand by it! ♦

What if we were to start drawing conclusions from a
FIXED STANDARD
like the camera?

Continued from page 1

I was too doubtful of the location to bring my sister along to do the “real assignment” that first time around, so I decided to just scout it out and maybe shoot a sunrise.

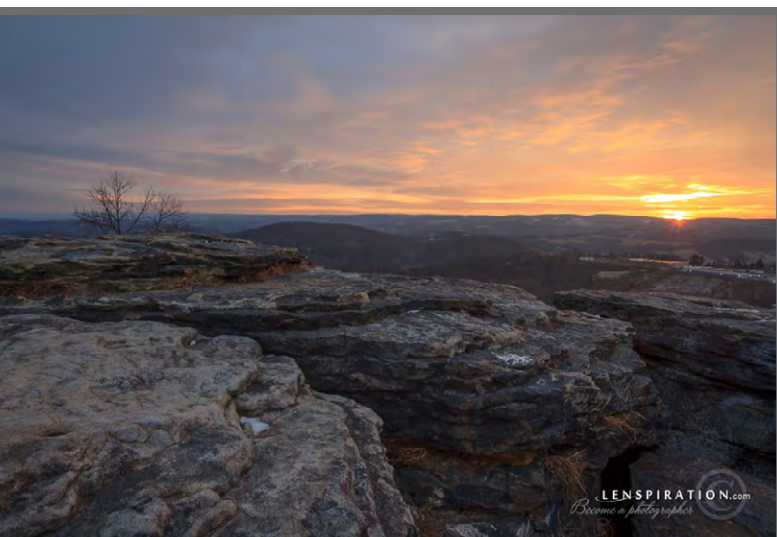
Amazingly, nothing interrupted the original plan. The airport run went smoothly.

On the way home, I didn’t think there would be much of a sunrise. It was pouring the snow in Pittsburgh and when I arrived at Dorsey’s Knob there were still plenty of clouds. But there was also a tiny sliver of potentially clear sky above the horizon...



Whether or not the sun decided to come out, it was worth the stop. As I awaited sunrise, I spent the time working out compositions and angles for the “real assignment”. True, it was not an ideal spot, but it could work in a pinch.

When the sun came up, it was an added bonus that it actually penetrated through the clouds. It’s helpful, you know, to have actual sunlight for calculating exactly how light will lay on the land. :)



I experimented shooting both horizontally and vertically, keeping in mind: “how would I shoot this for the cover of a book, to incorporate a rough path and ominous mountains in Photoshop later?”

There was graffiti all over the place too. Mountains and paths wouldn’t be the only things I’d have to Photoshop out for the cover of the book...

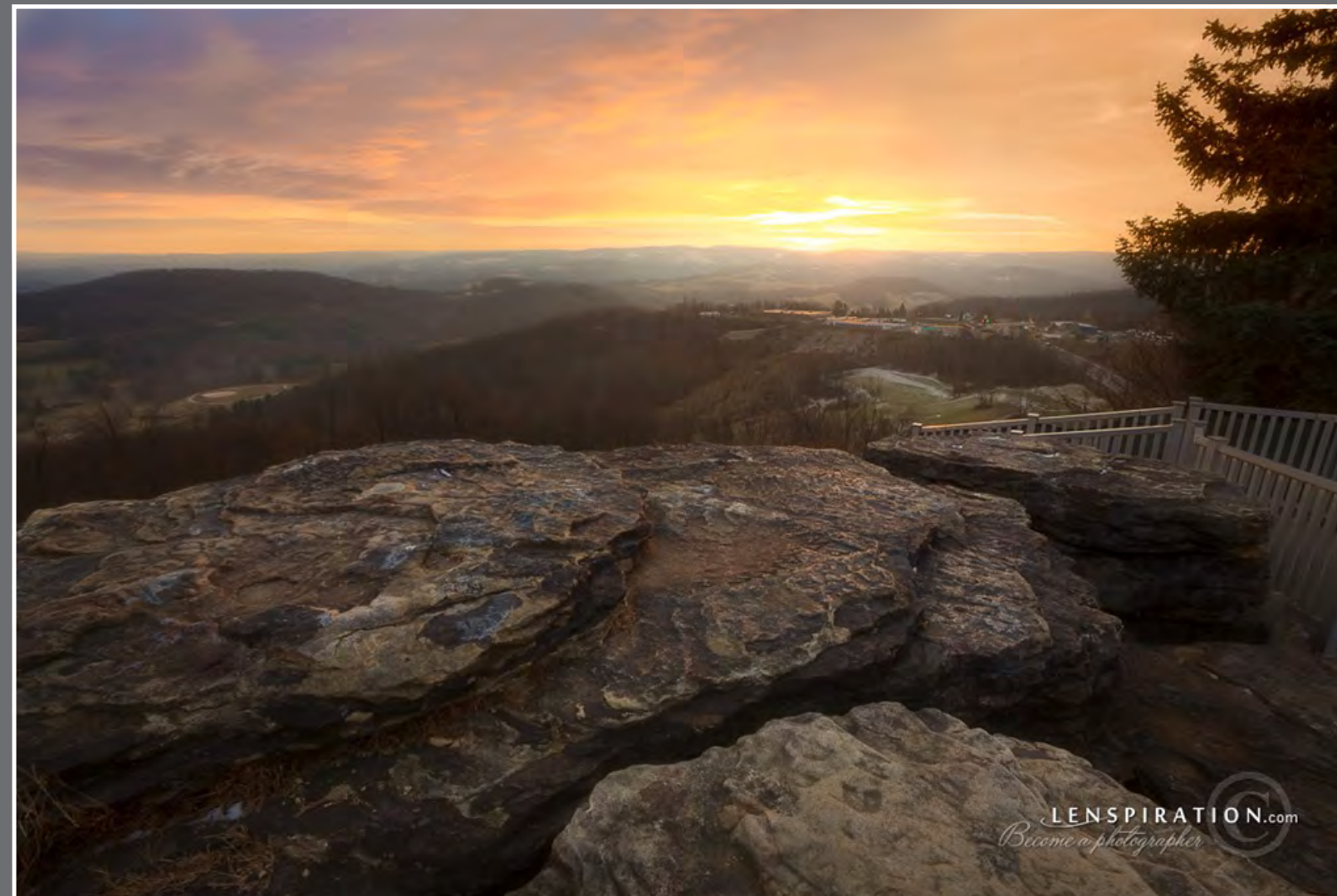
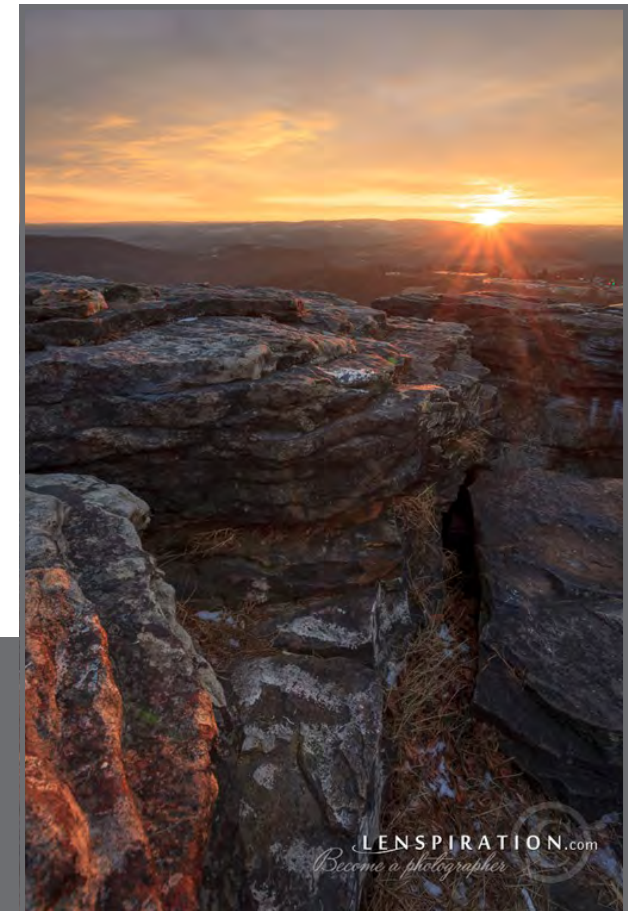
The sun disappeared after only a few short minutes. Thankfully, it was a nice enough sunrise to take away one or two good shots that could work for a desktop background...



No, it wasn’t the “perfect spot”, but by the time I left I had concluded that it would indeed be a good enough location to attempt shooting the “real assignment” before the December 23 deadline.

And, so, that’s where I went to shoot the “real assignment”!

I can’t wait to share how it went! But that will have to wait for another post. Keep your eye out for a followup video on www.lenspiration.com/shoottoserve. ♦



Sky Rock Overlook

Dorsey’s Knob,
Morgantown, West Virginia

Download as
desktop background at
www.lenspiration.com/wallpapers

Where I'm Learning And Growing

I hope these articles and tutorials are as helpful for you as they were for me during my regular, recent research on the web:

1

[Why Shutter Speed Priority Mode is Useless](#) — by Nick Carver. I love common sense, unconventional perspectives like this! Understand this article, and you know you're beyond the basics.

2

[Tips for shooting in the cold](#) — by Russ Burden. If you're not used to shooting in the snow and cold, this is a good article to brush you up on the basics, and perhaps give anyone a tip or two they never knew.

3

[30 helpful gadgets for landscape photography](#) — by Jim Harmer. Being the spendthrift that I am, I took this article more humorously than I did seriously. It's amazing the kind of things they can come up with to make life easier! If nothing else, it's a good list to have on hand next time you're birthday shopping for a photographer.

“

Thanks for another beautiful church calendar! The exquisite artistry coupled with the meaningful texts from Scripture and song make a beautiful Christmas gift for families and individuals in our congregation—and enables us to keep track of all the special days in our church throughout the year.

—Susanne, Olivet Baptist Church, Treasurer

There are not many [Original Lenspiration 2018 calendars](#) left, but if any PRO member would like to have one for free, I can send you one! Just email me at james@lenspiration.com to request it. Thanks for being a PRO member.



Keep Making The Most Of PRO!

You are working hard to become a better photographer. It'll be worth it, one of these days! All the little baby steps you've taken in the last month (watching Lenspiration training videos, shooting for Shoot to Serve assignments, taking note of tips from the Critique Webinar, and browsing through all the other Lenspiration PRO features) they all accumulate and contribute to creating that big, giant step toward professionalism. It may not feel like you've grown much, but think back to before you joined PRO. You are moving forward!

And thankfully, photography is such a vast topic that there's so much more to move forward into! Take some time to check out the latest Shoot to Serve opportunities to get an idea of what on the plate for next month!

And of course, don't forget to slow down sometimes and just enjoy taking pictures. :)

[View the next assignment](#)

lenspiration.com/shoottoserve

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lenspiration.com/promember