

Stephen Bay's Photography Newsletter

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Welcome. This is the first issue of my first newsletter and I'm really excited to be sending this out. My goal is to publish bi-monthly but we'll see how it goes.

I will be experimenting with different content, so please let me know what you like, but I will have a mix of general interest updates and then some information and tips for photographers.

Finally, feel free to share and forward this newsletter. If you are not already subscribed, you may [sign-up with this link](#).

What I've been shooting

As a landscape photographer, I always find that summer time is hard in San Diego. We have a heavy marine layer so we almost never have a wonderful sunset with strong colors. The day might be sunny but as late afternoon comes around the sun dips behind an incredibly thick layer of clouds. The desert is also very inhospitable -- the average high in Borrego Springs is approximately 107F during July and August. However, despite conditions I did manage to explore a few new spots.

Valley of the Moon, Jacumba



The Valley of the Moon is about an hour east of San Diego. The trail head is right by Jacumba (exit 77) and you have driven by it if you've taken the I-8 to Arizona -- it's that spot where where you start traveling through some very photogenic rock formations.

Although the valley is in the desert, it's at a higher altitude (~4500ft) and thus is significantly cooler (i.e. it may be in the 90s instead of 100+). This brings it into the range of hikeable temperatures, especially if you go in the late afternoon/night or very early in the morning

The valley is filled with rock structures just like in my photo. They are in every direction. It's a spectacular place and a dream location for photographers as there are many different compositions available. You can walk around and even climb on top of many of the boulders. To me, the area feels very similar to Joshua Tree.

The hike is 6-8 miles round trip from the trail head with about 1000' of elevation gain. There are many forks in the path so make sure you have a good map. It's possible to drive there if you have a serious 4WD vehicle but do not attempt unless you are a very experienced off-roader.

Breakers Beach, Naval Air Station North Island



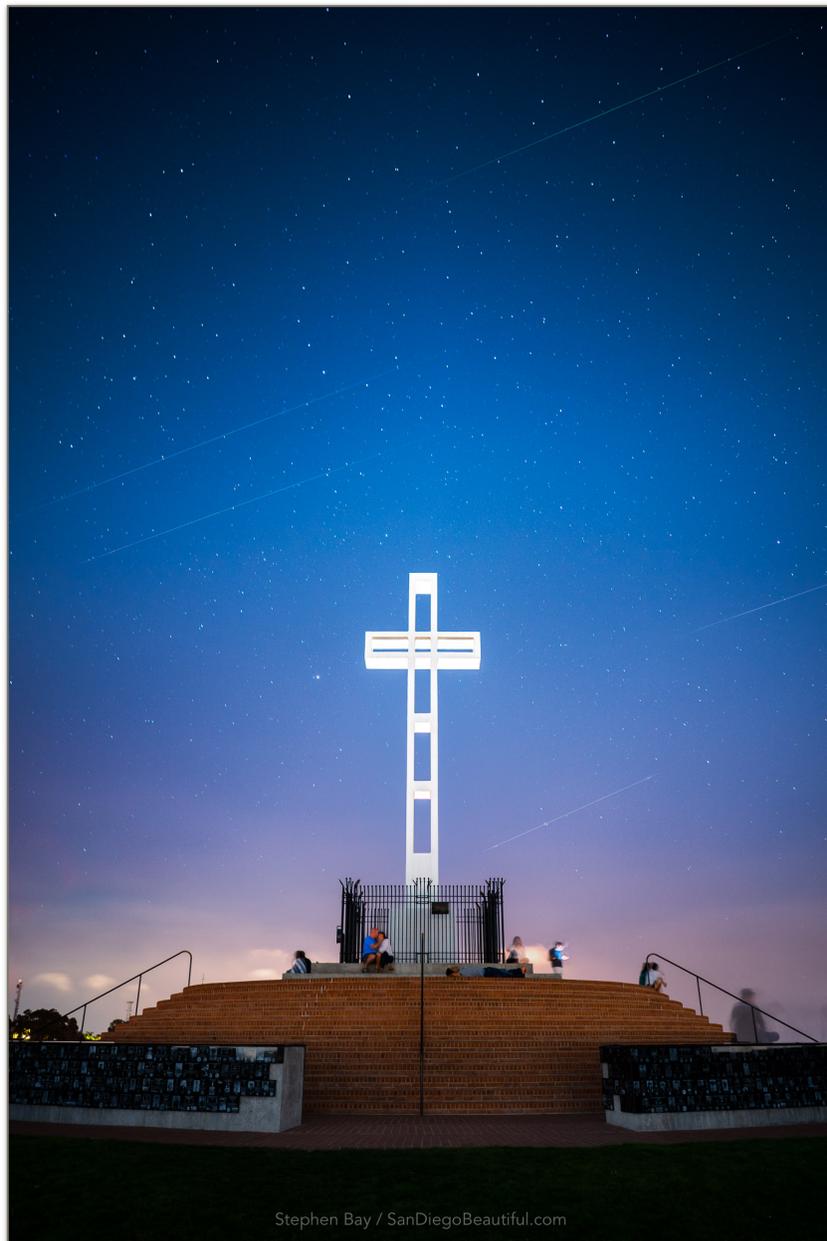
This is a photo that I never expected that I would make. I shot this on July 27 which is the day of the full moon. My original plan was to go with a friend to the North Island Naval Base in Coronado and catch the moon setting behind the Point Loma Lighthouse. Unfortunately the marine layer interfered and the moon dipped behind the clouds before it aligned with the lighthouse. While I was disappointed, we decided to make the most of the situation by exploring Breakers Beach.

For those that don't know, Breakers Beach is on the military base and has become a somewhat popular spot for people who want to abandon their sailboats. The military often

removes the boats but there are a couple that are stuck in the sand further out from shore where it's too risky to bring in heavy machinery to remove them.

I highly recommend checking out the beach, but if you are not in the military you need to go as the guest of someone with access.

Perseid Meteor Shower from Mt Soledad



This year the Perseid meteor shower fell during the new moon so the skies were significantly darker than prior years. Most people went to east county (Mt Laguna, Borrego Springs, etc) to view the meteors but I wanted to capture them in the city with a recognizable landmark. So I

headed up to Mt Soledad in La Jolla and sky watched for about 2 hours. I wasn't sure if any meteors would be visible due to the city lights, but luckily I managed to catch a few of them.

Note: the photo is a composite of 5 images, one per meteor, each with the exact size and position as originally seen. The meteors are all parallel because they originate from a radiant within the constellation of Perseus.

Recommended Video

Here's a video by Ted Forbes on the secret of being a great photographer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U--Tn19nYME>

He doesn't say anything that should come as a surprise, but I think hearing the details is motivating and very helpful. I also think that you could apply what he says to any endeavor, not just photography.

New Gear



This won't ever be a gear focused newsletter, but I will mention some items that I've picked up to help in my photography. My most recent acquisition was a \$13 compass from REI. You might ask why does a photographer need a compass? Well first of all, it's a hiking essential and just darn useful to prevent you from getting lost. As a landscape photographer, you pretty much have to hike to reach all the best spots.

But the main reason I have a compass is to plan my shots. I might have a scene in mind with a foreground and background subject. I then need to figure out when the sun, moon, or milky way is going to line up with my composition. While you can use apps on your phone like Photopills, the internal compass is very inaccurate. So many times I've been shooting with friends and we all pull out our phones to figure out when the Milky Way is going to lineup and the results are wildly different. Heck my phone isn't even consistent when I switch from horizontal to vertical.

I actually already had a compass but it didn't have an adjustment for magnetic declination which is the difference between true north and the magnetic north pole. In San Diego, you need to adjust the compass reading by about 11 degrees, however I can never remember if the adjustment is to the east or west.

So I did some research and picked the Brunton TruArc 3 which is the smallest decent compass where you can set the magnetic declination. It costs \$13 and weighs 33g (not including the lanyard).

Upcoming Plans

In September, I go on my annual trip to visit my family in Toronto. This is usually 2-3 weeks where I don't do any photography except for family snapshots. It gives me a bit of downtime to reflect and recharge.

Once I get back (and perhaps a little bit before I leave), I'd like to make a few photos of the Milky Way at the coast. At the beginning of the year, the Milky Way rises in the South East but towards the fall, it gradually shifts to the south and eventually south-west. In San Diego this means you can shoot the Milky Way over the coast away from the city lights. It still helps tremendously if you can find an area with relatively little light pollution (Torrey Pines Beach is a good spot). Another tip would be to shoot when we have Santa Ana winds blowing as they tend to bring dry air improving star visibility.

As things cool down, I'm going to make more trips out to the desert. There are quite a few petroglyphs in the area. Another subject I've been thinking about are the slot canyons in Anza Borrego. They are present in a few locations such as by Ocotillo Wells and in the north-east on the way to the Calcite mine. I did a scouting trip in January but haven't yet been back. Here's a quick cell phone shot I made:



Have a great Labor day weekend

Happy shooting and thanks for reading this far!

Stephen

P.S. I also started a [blog on my website](#). For now I have a few articles on astrophotography but definitely plan to cover topics ranging from the creative (composition, vision, motivation) to technical side (field procedures, post-processing, gear).