

# Run and Gun Photography

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A friend in Texas living fifty miles from the nearest camera store is planning a once-in-lifetime vacation in Alaska. She wanted my opinion on what to take. While owning several cameras, she wanted to take her Nikon D3200 with the standard 18 - 55 mm kit lens based on the superior picture quality in comparison to her P&S cameras.

I suggested a Nikon 55 - 200 telephoto to give her more reach for wildlife photos, 52 mm Hoya SMC UV filters for both lenses, a lens hood for each lenses if they came without a lens hood, a couple of Op/Tech rain sleeves, some basic cleaning supplies and a compact messenger bag in which to carry everything.

She wants to travel light with just carry-on luggage. She has a couple of camera bags of uncertain origin and a couple of large totes, one of which might do double-duty as both a purse and a camera bag. I suggested that she Google "camera wraps." Tight-fitting camera wraps, or even a couple of old socks, will keep her camera and lenses from getting banged up in her tote or luggage.

The UV filters and Rain Sleeves will protect her camera and lenses from grit, grime, dust and salt spray. Salt spray is a given if she takes a tour boat to see the whales. The folks at Camera Works in Colorado Springs tell me that they see a lot of lenses ruined by "cleaning" with cocktail napkins, dirty shirt tails and other field-expedient materials.

Since I was in Camera Works, I purchased a one ounce screw-cap bottle of [ROR cleaning fluid](#), a micro-fiber cleaning cloth and a [Lens Pen](#) which I'll send her. I don't trust the cleaning supplies that she might find at a rural Walmart which, at twenty-five miles from the front porch, is her closest source for a loaf of bread.

Pondering her questions prompted several questions of my own. Long retired, I'm no longer concerned with crime and accident scenes but, from long habit, I carry my gear in well-padded, weatherproof, nearly indestructible Pelican cases. Before Pelican came along, I used aluminum Zero Halliburton cases which are too rich for my blood at today's prices and too easily dented from banging around in

the back of a truck or when subjected to the tender ministrations of airline baggage handlers. Unlike Halliburton, Pelican cases will accept TSA-approved padlocks.

During my working career, I invariably worked out of a well-equipped truck or a full size sedan, back when a full size sedan meant a Chrysler Newport, a Plymouth Fury or a Ford Custom 500. Now retired, I'm still working out of a 4WD Dodge pickup. My priorities are still more concerned with protecting my equipment in transit than convenience once I reach my destination.

However, my wife and I are contemplating a trip this summer that will include Mount Rushmore, the Devil's Tower, the Little Big Horn national monument and the Museum of the Rockies, a mandatory stop for all dinosaur aficionados.

This will entail a lot of walking, making it impractical to return to the truck to swap lenses or stick a flash in my pocket. Back in the cave days I occasionally wore a photographer's vest and I still wear one today when I need to conceal a weapon. All those big pockets are there for a reason.

Colorado is an open carry state. Outside of the Denver metro area, nobody gets excited when they see a civilian with a gun on his or her hip pushing a shopping cart up and down an aisle at the local supermarket. However, having spent my working life in Texas where the law and good manners require keeping a weapon concealed around civilians, I still carry concealed unless I'm wandering around in bear country far from the nearest paved road.

I long ago discovered that I was better off wearing a cross-draw holster because strong side holsters invariably interfere with a photographer's shoulder bag and (in the days of yore) an external power pack for Honeywell, Heiland and Graflex flash units. IMHO, the best cross-draw holsters come from [Simply Rugged](#) and [Western Image Leatherworks](#).

I hated carrying an external battery pack so much that I used flashbulbs long after strobes were perfected. The cord was constantly getting wrapped around my gun butt and, on one memorable occasion, pulled the gun out of my holster while I was standing knee-deep in a dumpster. The Vivitar 283 circa 1972 was the first electronic flash powered by AA batteries that had enough power to render flashbulbs a thing of the past. (You can still buy flashbulbs from [flashbulbs.com](#).)

I concluded that, specifically for our next family trip and generally for any situation that might require working at an inconvenient distance from the truck, I

needed a well-padded shoulder bag that would carry just the stuff that I routinely need. The list includes:

- A Nikon D7000 camera with an 18 - 105 mm lens with UV filter and hood
- A Nikon 70 - 300 mm lens with UV filter and hood
- Center-pinch front caps for both lenses
- A Nikon SB-800 flash
- A spare camera battery
- Spare AA batteries for the flash
- Two spare 16 GB memory cards for the camera
- A one ounce screw cap bottle of ROR cleaning fluid
- A micro-fiber cleaning cloth
- A Lens Pen
- A Lumiquest Pocket Bouncer
- A two-pack of Op/Tech Rain Sleeves

I prefer to leave lens hoods in place while I'm working. Center-pinch front caps can be installed and removed without removing the lens hood. I leave the front caps in place while I'm traveling and remove them while I'm working.



The closet held an unused all-weather Lowepro AW200 camera bag but it was too short to accommodate the lenses with the hoods in place and a little too large for what I had in mind. This, in turn, dictated the purchase of a smaller but deeper shoulder bag than those that I've owned in the past.



My normal working kit consists of a Pelican 1520 case and a tool tote with the incidentals, plus a second camera, a tripod, a monopod and a 1,075 lumen Coast HP550 flashlight. This covers virtually every eventuality with the exception UV and IR. My UV kit will fit in the tote but I don't carry it unless I'm called upon to demonstrate reflected UV techniques or check the motel's housekeeping.

Obviously this is far too much stuff to lug around on a family vacation when we'll be accompanied by a standard poodle and our new dachshund puppy.

After scouring Walmart, Best Buy, Camera Works and Michael's Camera, I purchased a [Tamrac Evolution Messenger 2](#) bag on closeout for fifty bucks. While this particular bag has been discontinued, Lowepro, Tamrac and others make similar bags serving the same purpose.

For travel, landscape and wildlife photography plus an occasional trip to the zoo, this list satisfies my requirements. For crime scene work, I could replace the telephoto with a macro and stick a Nikon SC-29 off-camera flash cord in one of the external "stretch" pockets intended to carry a water bottle.

The messenger bag configuration is flatter than the usual soft-side camera case. This configuration is similar to the old Domke Reporter but with more pad-

ding for travel. The Domke Reporter is still popular with photo-journalists who need to carry a minimal kit..

To prove that everything that I wanted to carry would actually fit with lens hoods in place, I had to bring my Pelican case into the store and install the hood on the 70 - 300. Even so, we had to try several bags and rearrange Velcro inserts to prove that this bag was the least expensive bag that satisfied my requirements. I wasn't interested in paying \$100.00 or more for a nicer bag.



I'm not ready to lug a tripod around on a daylight sightseeing excursion. However, my now-discontinued Giottos MM 5580 is handy both as a camera support and as a trekking pole. Manfrotto, Benro and Oben make similar monopods that serve the same purpose.

A monopod with a tilting camera mount is near-indispensable for telephoto and surveillance work. If you're shooting out of a vehicle with a long lens, you can use your monopod as an impromptu gunstock mount for increased steadiness. Cheap monopods, like cheap tripods, are a waste of money.

The other items that I routinely carry while traveling are a Leatherman Wave and a Streamlight Polytac on a 1¾ belt. Add a .44 Magnum (the minimum if

you're wandering far from the nearest paved road in bear country) and a six round dump pouch on the same belt and I'll wear a pair of suspenders.

Simply Rugged makes nice leather belt cases for Leatherman Waves and tactical flashlights with a one inch barrel. They're dressier than the cases that you'll find at a police equipment supply house and priced accordingly.

How does this conglomeration work in practice? Very well, thank you very much.

The Tamrac case is not sealed against rain and dust but the all-weather Lowepro case was far from dust-proof. I had to take everything out and vacuum the innards every year or so. I normally store and transport my gear in Pelican cases and move what I think I might need into a soft-side case when I know that I'll be working far from the truck.

I'm not happy with a camera hanging around my neck. I use a neck strap to prevent dropping the camera rather than as a comfortable way to carry the camera for several hours at a time.

A messenger bag lets me carry my camera and my telephoto lens with hoods and filters in place. If it rains, I put my jacket or a disposable plastic poncho on over the bag. If I want to shoot while it's raining or I'm working under dusty conditions, I put the camera in a Rain Sleeve. I purchase "flash" Rain Sleeves so I can work at night.

I routinely carry a focusing 1,075 Lumen Coast HP550 flashlight and a 210 lumen Coast HL7 headlamp in the truck. More often than not, I'll be wearing a 210 lumen Streamlight Polytac or a focusing 360 lumen Coast HP7 on my belt. ***Coast makes headlamps, focusing and non-focusing, with ratings up to 800 lumens for serious crime scene work.***

Spend enough time working nights and you'll soon learn to appreciate a good flashlight. I'm partial to focusing flashlights that will give me a wide flood for indoor work and a long spot for outdoor work, to include focusing to targets beyond the range of the camera's built-in focusing aid.



The beauty of this system, borrowed from a legion of press and event photographers over a period of fifty-odd years, is that once I remove my lens caps and stow them in one of the many compartments, I can grab the camera, hang the strap around my neck, and start shooting in a matter of seconds.

If I need more reach, I can remove the standard 18 - 105 zoom (which covers most situations nicely) and drop it in the case. I can mount the 70 - 300 telephoto merely by removing the rear end cap. Should I need the flash, it's right there. If I want to carry a backup camera, the slot to the right of the flash will accommodate my Panasonic ZS9 pocket camera.

When I'm through for the day, I reset the camera to my preferred defaults and replace the center-pinch front caps and button everything up before stowing the case in a plastic tote box on the truck's back seat. The plastic tote keeps the dogs from gnawing on my camera strap, chewing the sleeves off my jacket and eating the 50 gram clotting sponges in my first aid kit.

The first step is having your camera in a well-padded yet easily accessible carrying case. The second step is setting up your camera so you can start shooting as soon as your feet hit the ground. My standard setup for a Nikon DSLR is:

- Program mode
- Matrix metering
- Single frame advance
- Auto-focus with only the center spot active
- Auto white balance
- Auto-bracketing off
- Zero exposure compensation
- Focus priority enabled
- Manual ISO set to the base ISO value (typically ISO 100)
- Default values for color, contrast, sharpness and so forth.
- All gimmick modes such as redeste reduction turned off

After doing this for more years that I care to remember, I can tell at a glance whether I need to kick up the ISO to obtain a shutter speed fast enough to prevent camera shake and freeze subject motion and an aperture small enough to capture sufficient depth of field.

If the light is iffy, I'll dial in ISO 400 and shoot the scene just like I'd shoot the same scene with Tri-X or Portra 400. Shooting flash outdoors at night, I'll often dial in ISO 1000. If I'm shooting under tungsten or fluorescent lights, or under a cloudy sky or in open shade, I'll dial in a manual white balance. In high contrast lighting, I'll often switch to spot or center-weighted metering to ignore extraneous light in the foreground or the background.

This sort of thing comes with experience. In the film era, we learned by processing our own B&W negatives in a wet darkroom and by shooting color slides demanding accurate exposure and color-compensating filters.

***If you want to advance beyond the fair weather sunny day point and shoot level*** in the digital era, there is no substitute for processing and printing your own JPEGs using an advanced editor such as Faststone, Gimp, Photoshop or Photoshop Elements. If nothing else, this will teach you that the slipshod notion that you can fix your mistakes after the fact in Photoshop is a waste of time and energy. ***Learn to get things right in the camera. Wait for the focus confirmation indicator before pressing the shutter release.***



Students obliged to use a school loaner for lab assignments and police officers required to use a camera passed from hand to hand at every shift change are at a disadvantage when it comes to mastering the fundamentals of photography.

My opinion of schools charging good money for an on-line evidence photography course that does not require taking pictures under operational conditions and submitting enlargements at full camera-original resolution to an instructor grading with a critical eye will not be repeated here.

You really need your own camera or a camera that you can use on your own time to become proficient above the auto-everything level. My Nikon D7000 came with a 325 page manual but I had to buy David Busch's 533 page D7000 guide before I was comfortable with all of the camera's advanced features.

Photography is like shooting. You've got to put rounds downrange to prove that you can hit the target. Enlargements of photos taken under operational conditions and printed full frame on a photo-quality inkjet printer using 8.5 x 11 or larger premium glossy inkjet paper are proof that you can indeed hit the target.

If you don't have a printer, Costco can print 8 x 12, 12 x 18 and 20 x 30 enlargements cheaper than I can print them at home (aside from the gas required to make the sixty mile round trip to my nearest Costco).

**For more information, see:**

[\*http://www.forensic-photography.com/exposure-basics.pdf\*](http://www.forensic-photography.com/exposure-basics.pdf)

[\*http://www.forensic-photography.com/non-destructive-faststone-workflow.pdf\*](http://www.forensic-photography.com/non-destructive-faststone-workflow.pdf)

[\*http://www.forensic-photography.com/Recommended-Internet-links.pdf\*](http://www.forensic-photography.com/Recommended-Internet-links.pdf)

[\*http://www.forensic-photography.com/crime-scene-investigator-net-links.pdf\*](http://www.forensic-photography.com/crime-scene-investigator-net-links.pdf)

These documents, free to anyone with an Internet connection, constitute the basics of what you might learn in a college-level evidence photography course taught in a brick and mortar classroom by a competent instructor.

Faststone is one of the better free photo editors but the same principles apply to Gimp, Photoshop, Photoshop Elements, Adobe Lightroom and other competent, professional-level photo editors. Don't waste your time with Picasa and other editors aimed at the Twitter, Facebook and smart phone crowd. They won't teach you what you need to know if you aspire to work above the point and shoot level.