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# The End of the Road

By Kas Stone



It began with a once-in-a-lifetime photographic road trip back in 2007. Maybe you know the kind? A whole year of planning and anticipation, more than a month of travel, eight thousand kilometres and a long list of must-see places along the route, huge excitement on departure day...

And what happened? Where did I go? Well, to be honest, I barely remember. What I do recall is the constant whirlwind feeling. At every stop I took out my camera and grabbed some shots, but there were so many places I wished I could have photographed more or waited for better light. As I pulled into my driveway a month later, I found myself wondering where all the time had gone.

In the end, all I had were thousands (and thousands!) of disappointing holiday snaps – and some hard lessons learned.

My photographic road trips are very different now. The debrief following that 2007 expedition led me to make some important changes that have ensured a greatly improved experience on the road and afterwards. My hope is that sharing my discoveries may help your journeys too.

## The Debrief

My biggest mistake in 2007 was to think that travelling great distances across exciting new terrain would lead to great photographs, when in fact the reverse turned out to be true. In hindsight, this 'less is more' truism seems embarrassingly obvious. But, as I set out from my then-home in suburban Toronto, eastbound for Quebec's Côte-Nord and coastal Labrador, the month ahead seemed bursting with photographic potential.

There is nothing inherently wrong with a whirlwind road trip. Non-photographers do it happily all the time. What can make this kind of journey problematic for photographers, however, is embarking on it with the wrong expectations. Whirlwind tours are an excellent way to scout. If I'd had that objective in mind in 2007, my trip would

not have been such a disappointment. I could have enjoyed the ride, taken some record shots, made notes about favourite places, and looked forward to returning to them later for a 'serious' visit.

Naturally, this strategy only works when time and finances make it actually possible to return. Otherwise the trip's success comes down to reining in one's expectations and making appropriate compromises between travel and photography. So, how is this done? Well, when planning a road trip with your camera, it is a good idea to ask yourself some important questions – and answer them honestly – right at the outset.

## Where Do You Want To Go – and Why?

As photographers, the most common answer is that you have been inspired by somebody else's pictures of a place, and you want to see and photograph it too. But dig a little deeper. Is there something unique about the place itself that you think will visually interest you? Or do you admire (or perhaps envy) the person whose photographs you saw, and want to follow in their footsteps to emulate



(or outdo) them. Or are you curious to see whether you can capture a different perspective at an iconic location –not just put your tripod in the same holes and come home with the same images as everybody else? Or do you simply need a holiday from your dreary routine, the novelty of something new?

## How Important Is The Place?

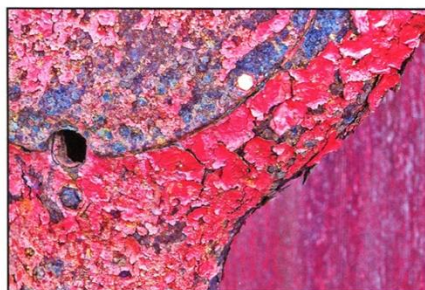
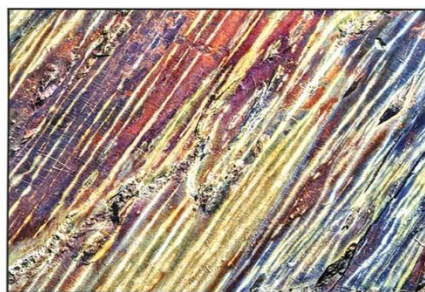
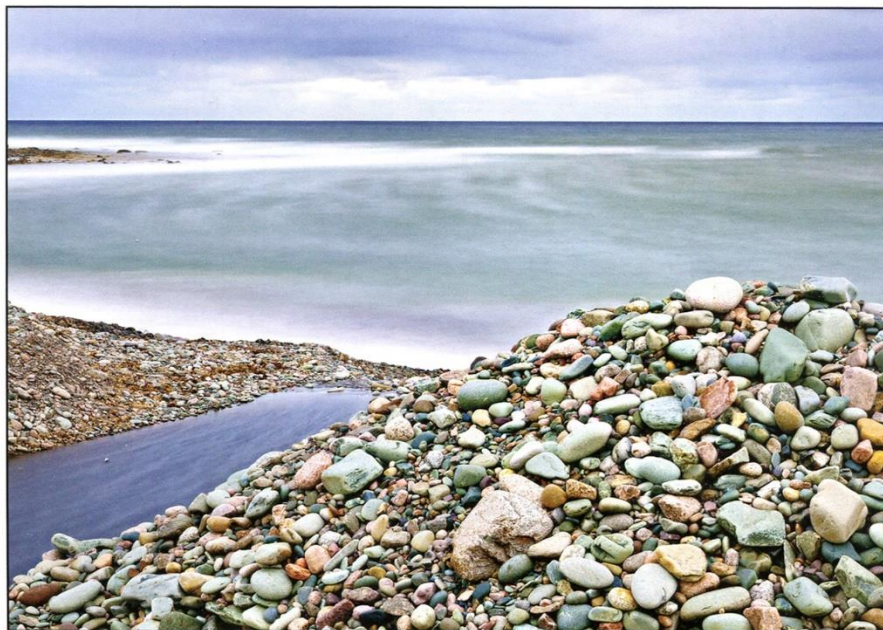
If it truly is the place that inspires you, then that is where you must go. Your biggest challenge will be getting there, blinkered so as not to become distracted or regretful about things missed on route. And, once there, it is vital to spend enough time in the place to properly immerse yourself—explore its hidden corners, see it in changing light and weather, sample its moods, absorb its character, and begin to feel at home. Only then will you be able to make photographs that are truly compelling (after all, it is another photographic truism that you should photograph what you know).

If, on the other hand, the motivation for your trip does not directly relate to the place itself, you might find that your photographic objectives could be met just as satisfactorily at another location, perhaps one closer to home. Narrowing your circle of possible destinations makes your road trip more personal and simplifies the logistics, with the added bonus of leaving a smaller carbon footprint.

One popular alternative is to plan a number of strategic ‘home bases’ along an extended route, staying a minimum of several days at each. This compromise between distance and time requires careful research beforehand, and an acceptance of the limitations inevitably imposed on your photography by the relatively short stay at each base.

## My Road Trip Strategy Now

Over the years since that whirlwind tour in 2007, I have tried many road trip strategies and settled at last on one that suits me perfectly. It works like this: I take the ugliest, most direct



route to my destination and set up camp. From there I make day-trips in ever widening circles and devote each day to exploring every side-road I come across, following it to its end.

Although these excursions typically begin in the car, they almost always end on my bicycle or on foot. So, as the crow flies, I never seem to get very far from camp. But what my end-of-the-road strategy has revealed are all the wonderful destinations not listed on the tourist maps, and countless quiet nooks and scenic spots where I have the view all to myself – with photographic opportunities galore.

But perhaps my most important discovery during these end-of-the-road

trips was that the place I most wanted to see at the end of the road was the Atlantic Ocean. So last year I packed up my belongings and moved. Now, from my home on Nova Scotia's southwest coast, my road trips are short, and I can find plenty of photographic inspiration in the wild coastal scenery right at the bottom of my driveway!

Kas Stone is a photographic artist based in Dublin Shore, Nova Scotia where she runs a studio gallery and leads digital imaging workshops. The photographs that accompany this article were made near the end of a road within 200 kilometres of home. Visit Kas and learn more [www.kasstone.ca](http://www.kasstone.ca). ❄