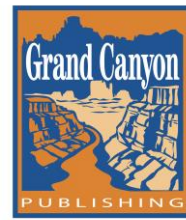


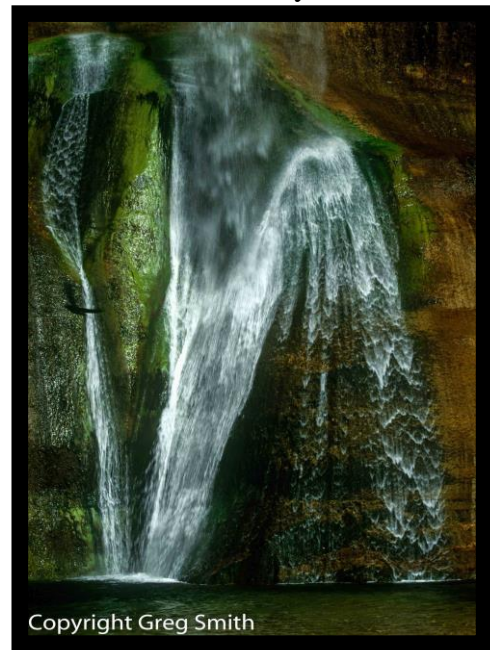
American Photo Tours

Post Office Box 8581
Mesa, Arizona 85214-8581
480-924-4943
AmericanPhotoTours.com

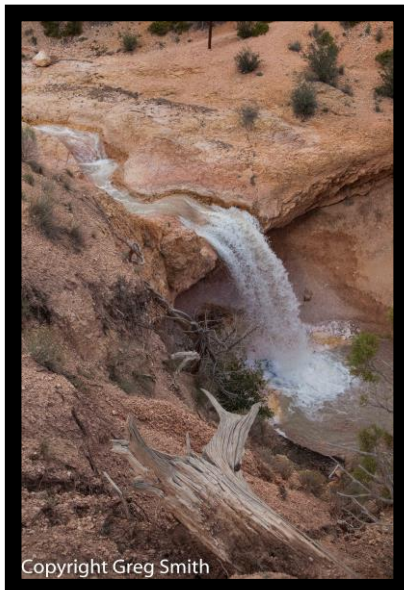


The Magic of Waterfalls By Greg Smith

From my earliest years in photography I have been intrigued, drawn to, and mesmerized by falling water. As a very young explorer in northern Ohio I was introduced to Brandywine Falls, now part of the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, but in the 50's it was just a private reserve and a relatively unknown part of this narrow overlooked canyon south of Cleveland. Later I would move to Upstate New York and find several beautiful hidden falls in the hills and glens of that wonderful green, and white, landscape. As part of the Upstate experience I would visit the great falls of the Northeast, Niagara and even travel back behind the thundering cascade on a rusty old elevator with foul weather gear from head to toe to witness the torrent from behind – still one of the most impressive experiences of my early years.



Calf Creek Falls with Raven - Utah



**Rare Perennial Stream
Bryce Canyon Utah**

As time went on and I could eventually drive, I would go farther and farther afield to find many other kinds of landscapes, but also to look for these moving, ever changing attractions in nature. With a car came a camera and I was now able to pursue my enthusiasm for all of nature, but with an ever present attraction to landscapes with streams and rivers and declivities that offered the prospect of water tumbling over a precipice. In the past thirty or so years I have traveled to six continents and have shot a lot of film and digital images of landscapes, people and the built up environment, but I never miss a chance to find a waterfall whenever one is in the neighborhood.

One may imagine that waterfalls are pretty much the same no matter where you go, and the physics of what defines a waterfall is quite constant, but the action of the water, the lighting, the setting with its foliage or even barrenness provide the elements that make these cataracts so enticing.

Photographing these magical elements in their natural settings is

often something of an art in itself, as so much can be captured or lost depending on the techniques and equipment that a photographer uses. The most important and too often ignored device in waterfall photography is the tripod.

Downward Plunge of Upper Falls in Yellowstone National Park



Equipment

Standard equipment for water features or any other landscape in nature would always include a good camera, film or DSLR, and fine lenses as well. Grab shots of any subject with point and shoot cameras or even those nasty cell phone devices (I actually do not even own one; just a personal statement about technology) will allow you to catch water in mid plunge and keep it forever. But for serious photography, there are a few items that will allow for the greatest creative flexibility and results, and should be considered for anyone setting out to do good work in the world of nature.



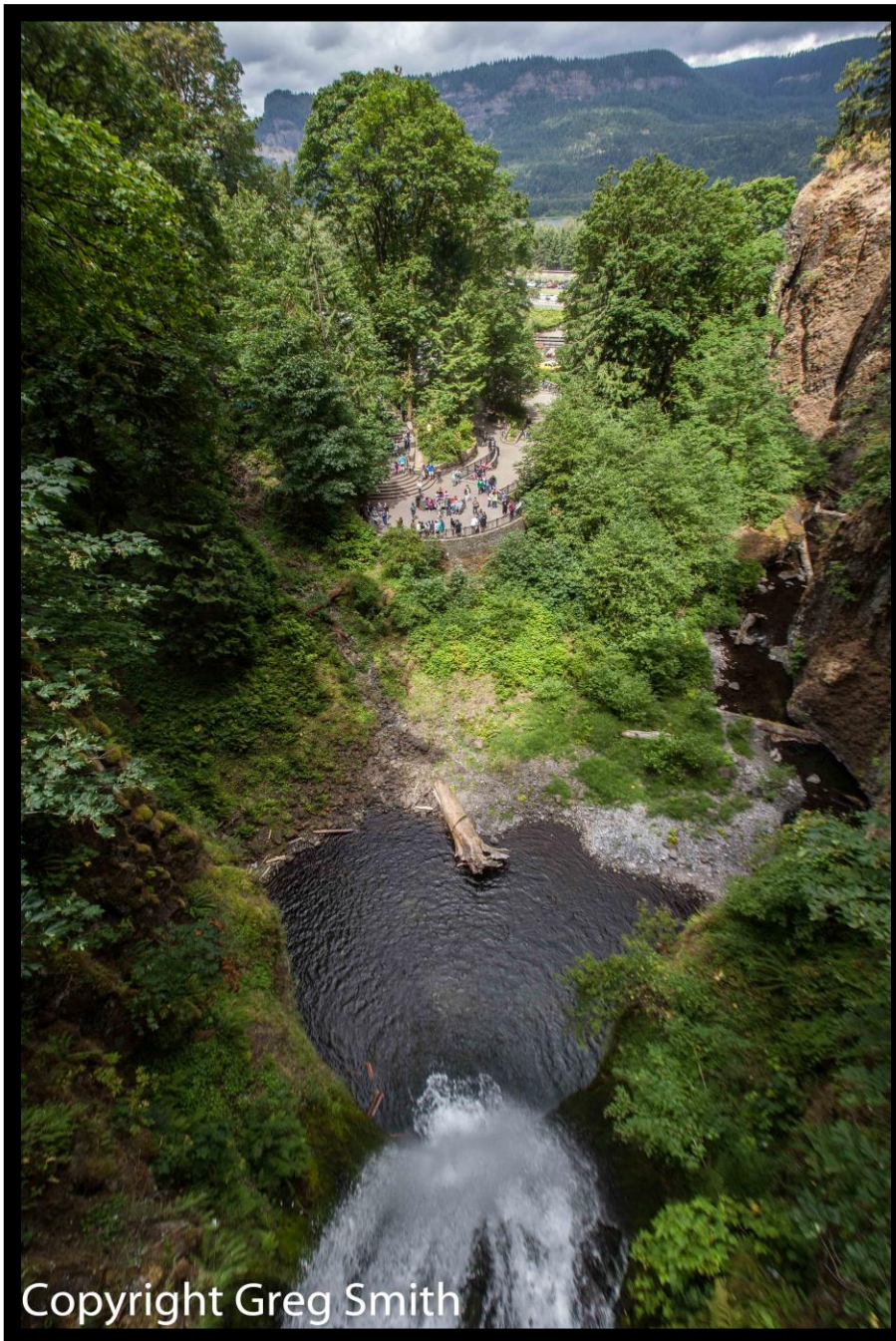
Soft Evening Light with Tripod and 400mm lens in Plitvice Lakes Area of Croatia

As mentioned, a tripod is a must if you hope to get any of those silky water effects that are so

popular, but it is also vital in many of the dark recesses and narrow canyons that harbor these great wonders. Late and early day shooting also tends to diminish light and choosing a great depth of field will necessitate a much slower shutter speed, hence the need for a stabilizer for your rig. I have used a tripod for most all of my landscape photography for decades, and while I do break free of its confinement on bright sunlit days, for the best results in nature, a tripod is critical.

The lenses that seem to be most useful actually span the range of most standard kits. I use a 24-105mm on a full CMOS camera body as a standard lens and find that it will capture most of what I aim at in waterfalls both large and small. This is a universal zoom and while it is very utilitarian, it also tends to see what I see, the sort of standard view of the world. If you want to get deeper into this subject it is essential to use both a wide angle and a longer telephoto lens to get the

entire view of the water feature. With the wide angle, I use a 16-35mm lens, you can get down near the water in the outflow, and still tilt up and see the plunging water of the falls itself. The view can be very exciting and interesting for any audience.



Extreme Wide Angle of Multnomah Falls – Columbia Gorge

The image here in the article looking down on the plunging water of the famous Multnomah Falls in the Columbia River Basin of Oregon/Washington reverses that view but shows the falls from the bridge, sweeping up to capture the plunge pool, the visitor gallery, and then all the way north across the Columbia River into the State of Washington. This is a very unusual view and one that can only be captured by leaning way over the side of the bridge, with a tripod in this case, and using a 16mm lens to boot. The lighting was very irregular but the sun came out for just a moment and brightened the entire scene.

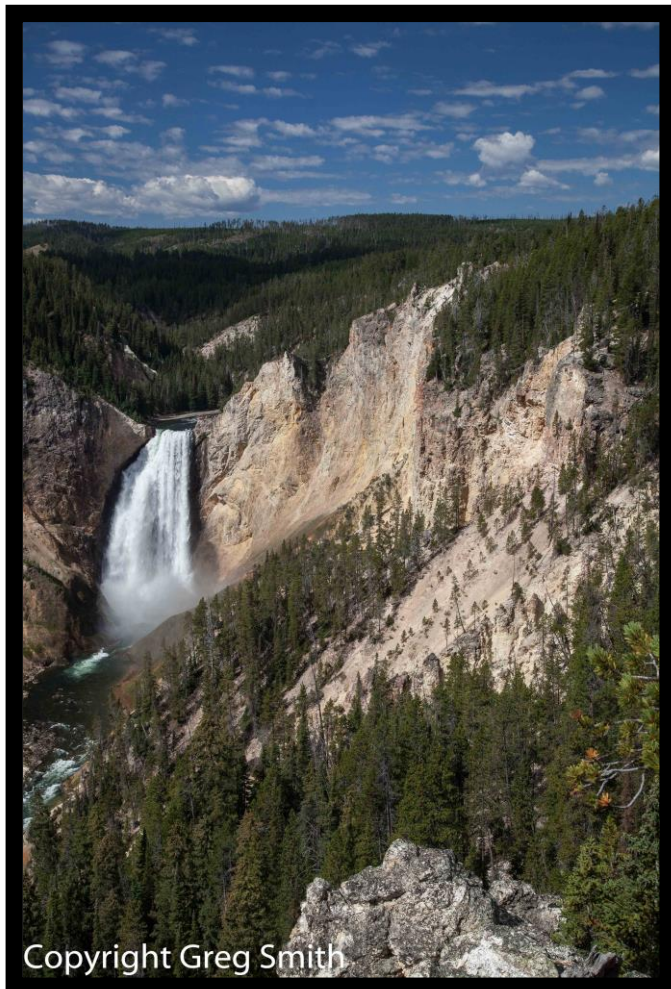
Another image that is included here is the one looking into the Upper Falls in Yellowstone Canyon. The water action here is complex and magical at the same time, and can be hypnotizing for any interested artist or photographer. The real magic in the water though, has to be captured in an instant in the camera, as the human eye is not able to freeze what it sees; our eyes act like a movie camera instead, and in the case of flowing water, this only yields a sort of blurry composite of air, water and light that actually yields a sort of angst for the observer. When it is stopped, however, it can be studied and appreciated for all its flecks and spray trails and power - one of the best uses of photography.

The long lens will get from Artist's Point in the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone all the way up river to the Lower Falls in the canyon, and that is important in itself. It will also help you reach up the sides of these river canyons to capture details in the rocks and outcroppings that are as interesting as the flowing water. In my case I have experimented with many lenses and find the 100-400mm zoom to be especially useful for all of this long distance work.

Another use for long lens is isolating an element of a falls that is especially beautiful. Darwin Falls in Death valley National Park is one of those places where the deep green algae has built up on the calcified pedestal at the base of the waterfalls and is stunning when viewed up close. What water is present in this wonderful national park is very heavy with minerals and this is one of those places where time and the motion of water has worked to create a remarkable sculpture in a remote canyon high in the hills above the valley floor. I photograph it as often as I can and am never disappointed in the result.

Finding Falling Water

Waterfalls can be spotted in any area where there are rolling hills or mountains, even in the desert. The best areas in the US are the wet areas of the temperate zones, especially the Columbia River Valley, the Olympic Peninsula and outstanding regions of the Cascades and Sierra Nevada Mountains. Many of the US National Parks are known for the best cascades including Yosemite National Park, Olympic National Park, smaller cascades in Great Smokey Mountains National Park and Yellowstone National Park.



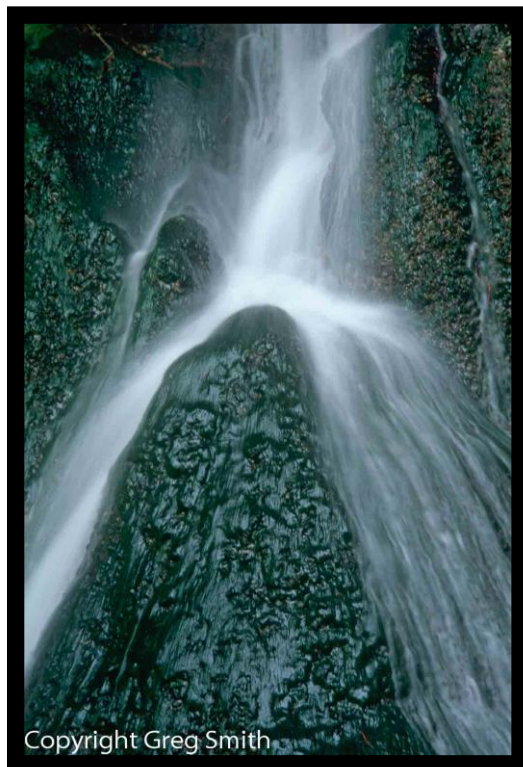
Lower Falls of the Yellowstone River



Copyright Greg Smith

Beautiful Darwin Falls in Death Valley National Park

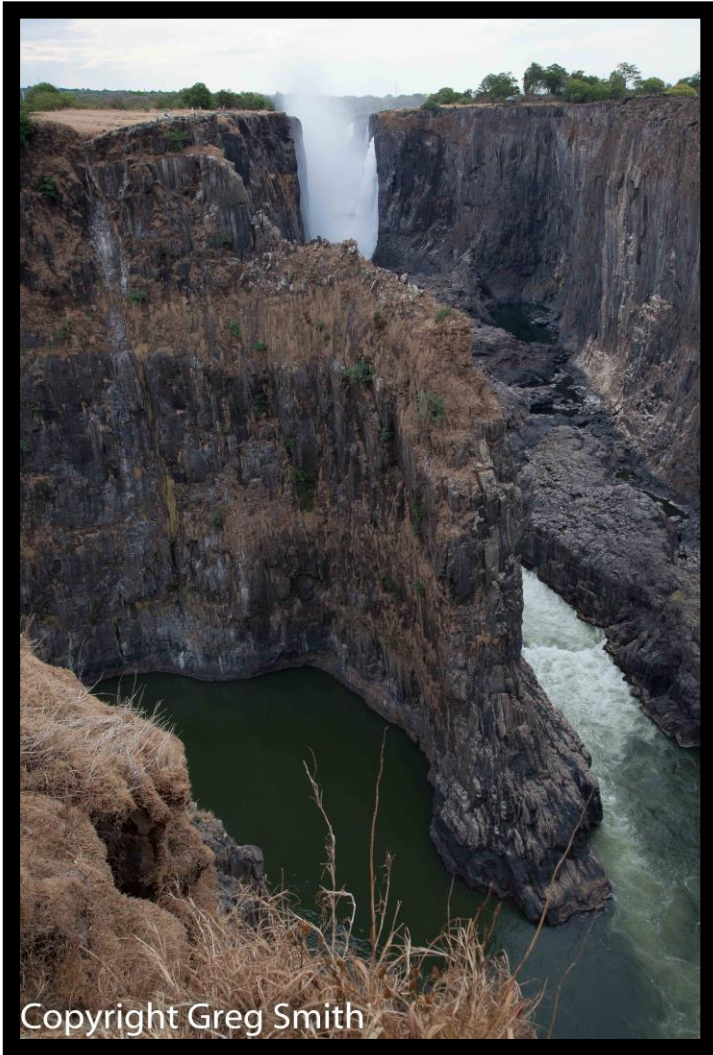
Detail of Darwin Falls



Copyright Greg Smith

Yellowstone is a stand out with an interesting story. There are perhaps a half dozen outstanding waterfalls in Yellowstone that are viewed by travelers, but many people over the past century have wondered why there weren't more, given the climate topography and seasons. Three particularly adventurous fellows from the eastern US asked the rangers at Yellowstone where the waterfalls were located on their topo maps, and were greeted with a blank stare as no one had ever really done a survey of the Waterfalls in the vast back country of the park. So, over some seven years these three guys, Paul Rubenstein, Lee Whittlesey and Mike Stevens spent their time and energy traveling to Yellowstone and hiking the backcountry with the specific intention

of locating and recording waterfalls on the maps of Yellowstone. They published a book, [The Guide to Yellowstone Waterfalls and Their Discovery](#),



Copyright Greg Smith

Dry Canyon of Victoria Falls - Zambia

old favorite, Victoria Falls, only to find she was flowing at 10% of her peak flow rate. But the barren canyons were delightful for photography, and I had new images to compare to the ones with gushing flows and large crowds in June and July. Here are two images I took of the rugged lava rock that is the base for this enormous cascade. For me, the contrast to the apparent smooth and soothing water coursing over the rocky edge of these cliffs, giving rise to these stunning water features is a wonderful contrast in nature and a sound reason for trekking half way round the world to capture it.

**Small Flow
Over Victoria
Falls**



Copyright Greg Smith

and have located nearly three hundred waterfalls and cataracts, about fifty of which were named or known before, but the balance had not been photographed or described before their tremendous effort of discovery, and they are still searching for more. This high caldera and plateau are a gold mine for anyone who wants to photograph this unique feature in nature.

Many waterfalls are seasonal, and journeying to Yosemite in much of the autumn and early winter will be disappointing as the very high waterfalls, even in Yosemite Valley actually go dry for a good portion of the year. As with most streams and water courses in the far West, the best times to travel to these parks and reserves to view and photograph waterfalls is in the spring when they are flush with snowmelt, or in late summer during the rainy season or Monsoon when they are flowing at or near their highest levels of the year. Africa is no different in its seasonal flows.

Recently I did an extended tour of southern Africa and managed to capture a very satisfying number of animals in my travels, but the season was not coincidental with the flow of the big rivers. As part of the trip, I went to Zambia and visited my

Small Features

The more you view and contemplate waterfalls and the various kinds of rushing water features that appear in the wilds the more you begin to see the little elements that make up the whole panorama of this phenomenon. I have spent four hours just photographing a hundred yards of a small frozen stream in Yosemite, fascinated by the icicles and frozen features of captured autumn leaves encased in ice, and the almost sluggish water trickling under and through this frozen layer.



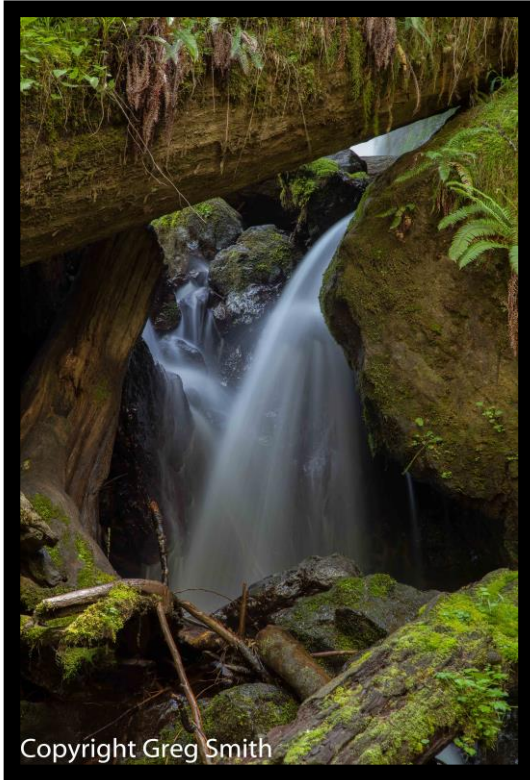
**A Rolling Rainbow
in the Spray of an
Oregon Falls**



**Stunning Akaka
Falls – Island of
Hawaii**

Copyright Greg Smith

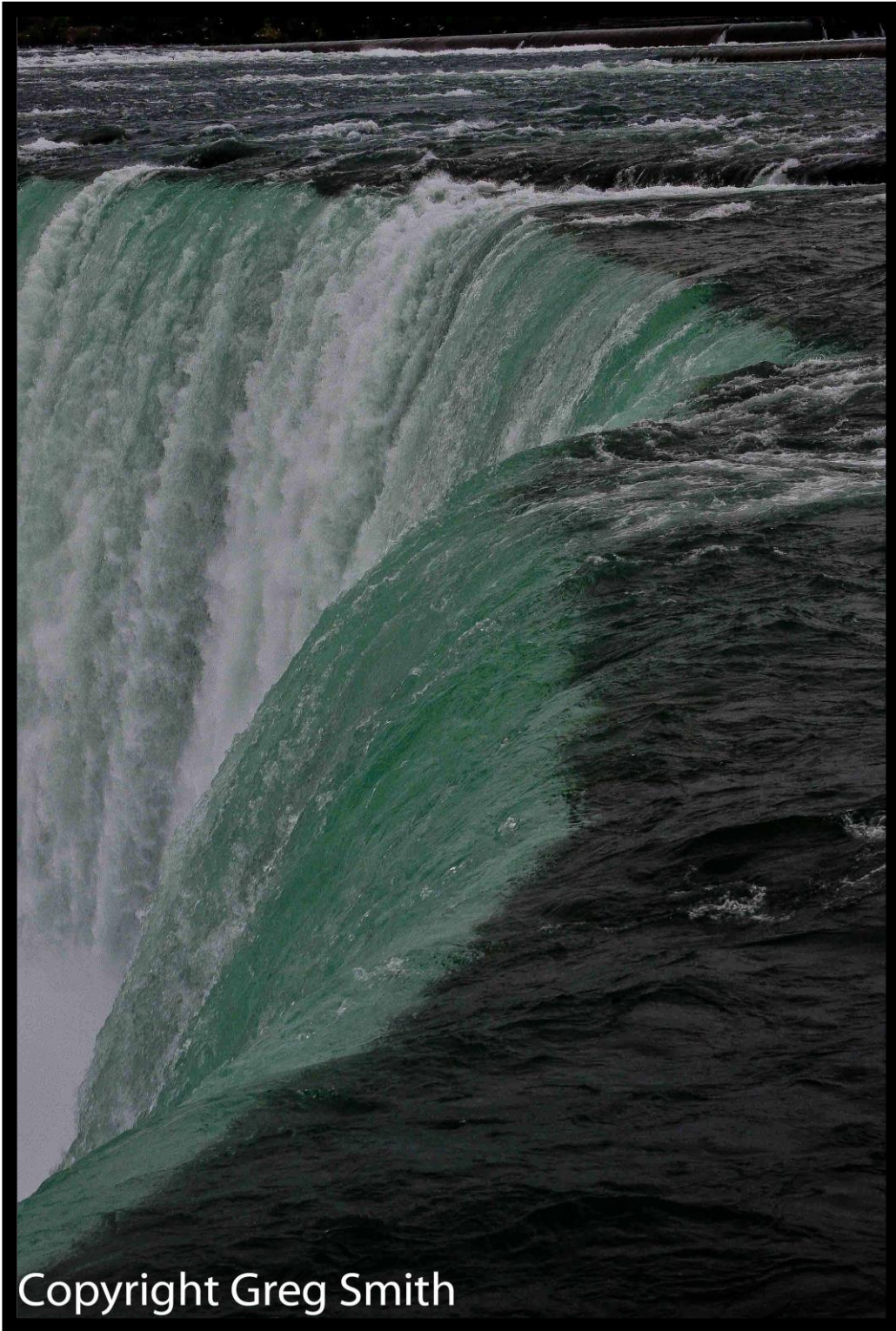
In the warm season, there are rainbows over the water and even views of tremendous power like the lip of Horseshoe Falls in Canada just as it tips over the edge. It is absolutely silent and truly inviting, something one must consider when getting too involved in their work! These smaller more intimate elements in rushing and falling water are as interesting and significant as the great plunges of water over the edge of lofty cliffs, and are what make this pursuit of moving water so galvanizing and breathtaking too. I am including a few more of these intimate moments that I have experienced, even Akaka Falls on the island of Hawaii, seen from afar but silent because of its distance and slim nature.



An Intimate Falls in the Olympics



The Top of the Flood - Plitvice Croatia



Copyright Greg Smith

The Near Silent Power of Niagara at the Brink



The Best View of an Overcrowded Natural Wonder

Have fun with this subject as you reach out to nature, and be creative in what you capture and bring home. Find your creativity in the lens and not so much in post processing. You will be rewarded many times over for your effort.

Copyright Greg Smith 2017