

Bisti Badlands: Land of Enchanted Rock

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Rarely visited and remotely located, the Bisti Badlands are amazing array of multi-colored badlands, hoo-doo, and clay mounds tucked away in the high desert of Northwest New Mexico. The clay hills consist of varying deposits of minerals such as coal, shale, silt, and mud stone with beautiful banding from orange and gray to rust and purple. Mixed in with the clay's multi-hued hills are harder deposits of sandstone and the effects of erosion have sculpted fantastical hoo-doo, pinnacles, and other strange formations reminiscent of Goblin Valley or the Paria Badlands of southwest Utah.

I visited this wilderness on an extended trip to Colorado this July when I got the itch to be in the desert. The monsoon was in full effect and I knew that my chances of getting the good light with dramatic clouds over the sculpted desert landscape where prime. I kept driving all day until I finally reached the small town of Farmington, New Mexico at around 6pm. Stocked up on water and a few supplies, I was now ready to make the last leg of the trip, some 40 miles across the desert to the trail head and the Bisti Badlands.

I arrived early enough to grab a quick bite from the cooler and slug down a gallon of water as the hot sun burned blisters and the dry air sucked the moisture right from the pores. So why, you ask, would someone want to visit the desert at the hottest time of the year? The Monsoon!

The monsoon happens every year in the desert southwest, effecting Arizona, western New Mexico, the mountains of Colorado, and the southern Utah. A large dome of high pressure sitting over eastern New Mexico and Texas drives warm, moist air from the Gulf of Mexico into the Southwest. Rapid daytime heating leads to upwelling of the moist air and the formation of widespread and occasionally intense thunderstorms. What comes along with these intense thunderstorms is the occasional burst of rain and flash flooding in the deep and narrow subterranean slot canyons, as well as the possibilities of amazing light and skies at sunset. Most of the year, very little rain occurs and high-pressure, cobalt blue dominates the skies.

Despite being relatively unprepared for this adventure, my destination was the Egg Factory, also known as the cracked eggs or egg garden. The Egg Factory is only 1.7 miles as the crow flies from the parking lot. Surveying the land and reading the description, I felt quite confident that I could make it to the desired location with plenty of time to spare before sunset.

The Egg Factory is a strange collection of cracked and sculptured rocks sitting in the middle of nowhere, like an alien hatchery from some late 1970s sci-fi movie. The monsoon was in full effect as virga and lightning fell from the sky to the northeast. The conditions were amazing and I wasted no time scouting out compositions and watching the western horizon for a clear break in the sky to illuminate the odd shaped rocks and alien landscape.

When the light show finally ended and the sky began to go dark, I sat for a few moments in the middle of this oddly eroded landscape and simply took in the view and the immense feeling of solitude. In these fleeting moments of magic, when the light, landscape, and atmosphere all come together in perfect harmony, I feel so fortunate to be alive and be able to appreciate and experience wild places such as this. This is the stuff that keeps me coming back to the wilderness in search of self-exploration and that eternal connection for the wild that is buried deep inside of all of us. I will return to the Bisti again in the full heat of summer



under an enraged sky and a landscape on fire.

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Joe Rossbach is a professional landscape and nature photographer based out of Annapolis, Maryland. Over the past ten years, he has traveled into some of the most beautiful and remote areas of the United States in order to capture the American landscape. His images have appeared in local and regional magazines, calendars, advertising campaigns, websites and in books and art galleries and corporate collections. Joe is a Mountain Trail Photo team member and leads through [Mountain Trail Photography Workshops](#). To see more of Joseph's images visit his website at www.josephrossbach.com.



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