

Feature Photo...

## Portals to Paradise

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Camera: Canon EOS 1n  
Lens: Canon 300/4L USM  
Flash: None used  
Support: Bogen 3221  
Film: Kodak Elitechrome 100  
Exposure: 1/60 at f/4  
Filter(s): None used

The transformation begins as I load my vest with equipment from the camera bag. I lock the telephoto lens and camera onto my tripod, close the car trunk and begin my hike through the park. With each step, the pent-up tension of modern living slowly fades away. My focus is now entirely on this moment, my ritual of quietly absorbing the natural beauty of this place.

The 3,400-acre State Park, which began as a privately owned nature preserve at the end of the Civil War, has become my favorite weekend retreat. Now open to the public for over a quarter century, it was only two years ago I first ventured through the open gate to see what treasures it may hold. A ten-minute drive from my home, a point that I had passed hundreds of times before, turns out to be a place of magical power. An abundance of wildlife, unfettered by the onslaught of civilization beyond the fenced-in borders, gracefully accepts the human intrusion into its home. A park surrounded by a sea of humanity, I count myself as one of the lucky few cast under its wonderful spell.

Though a park for all seasons, winter is when I find the magic most powerful. The magnificent oranges and reds of fall slowly give way to the monochromatic landscape of winter. A layer of freshly fallen snow contrasts the gray tones of bare trees. Along its 17 miles of wooded trails, the warm winter sunlight penetrates the barren canopy at a steep angle, creating mottled patterns of light below. White-tailed deer silently emerge from the surrounding shadows, mystical emissaries to investigate my presence. I compose an image of an approaching doe and expose a few frames. Moments later, I look up from the viewfinder to discover a group of them assembled around me. I step away from my equipment, the elation of being in the close presence of these beautiful creatures worth more than the photograph. Undisturbed by my activities, their curiosity draws them within touching distance. A gentle nudge on my arm, a nose-print on the lens. It's as if they know why I'm here and are willing to invite me into their world, to be one of them. As they move on, I know that no human honor will ever come close to matching the one they bestow upon me.

The magic quickly has its effect. A ten-minute drive to tranquility and peace-of-mind, where my stress and anxiety cannot exist. Where does this magic come from? Can it occur outside the boundaries of this place? I have seen the beauty of far-away locales in

the images of the masters, and can only imagine the magic of such places. For me, this park is my Serengeti, my Alaskan wilderness. I am here and the magic is real.

The framed prints hanging on my office wall remind me of my magical excursions. During those infrequent times when the phone isn't ringing, questions aren't asked or no meetings are held, I gaze at the images, as if windows into another world. For a brief moment, my mind transcends the physical location, drawn by some unseen power.

Can you feel the magic?

JE-NPN

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