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Left, outdoor photographer Patrick Endres on a trek through wild Alaska. His photos have appeared frequently on the cover and inside *Ruralite* magazine during the past 20 years.

Right, Patrick captured this image of a brown bear fishing for red salmon at the Brooks River falls in Katmai National Park in southwestern Alaska.

Photos courtesy of Patrick J. Endres



Dream Work

Every day is an adventure for professional outdoor photographer Patrick Endres

By Denise Porter

It isn't unusual for this hunter to hitch a two-hour ride in a bush plane far into Alaska's Arctic National Park in search of his target. Perhaps he is seeking polar bears or caribou. Maybe it's a mountainous sunset or the Aurora borealis. Whatever his prey, he is sure to find something worthy to shoot with his trusty camera.

With more than 25,000 images to his name, several books, numerous awards and 30 years' experience, Fairbanks photographer Patrick Endres, 51, is no stranger to the Alaskan wilderness. He has traveled extensively across the state and leads photography expeditions.

“I don't see my life as being that unusual at all,” Patrick says. “It's where I live. I know so many people who live this way.”

He may have lived here for 30 years, but Patrick still speaks with a slight Midwestern accent—a tribute to the roots that began his story.

Making Alaska Home

Patrick remembers picking up a camera “when I was really young,” he says. “It was an instamatic Kodak camera. From the moment I figured out what it was, I started taking pictures.”

The third of seven children, Patrick was raised in southern Wisconsin. He recalls traveling to the zoo in Madison and taking his camera along.



“Animals were always of interest to me,” he says. “I traveled with an agricultural veterinarian as a kid, riding along (on service calls). Back in that day, I don’t really know if that was unusual or not.”

Coming from a large family, Patrick understood he would need to pay for his own college education. He was lured to Alaska because “it was one of the cheapest out-of-state schools at the time,” he says.

Drawing from his interest in animals and nature, Patrick enrolled in the University of Alaska-Fairbanks to pursue a degree in biological sciences. Biology was interesting, but so, too, was graphic design and theology. Choosing a career that blended all he was interested in seemed daunting.

After seven years of college, bouncing back to the Midwest and earning a degree in theology, Patrick says Alaska’s frontiers beckoned once more. Still uncertain where his career path would lead, he was set to be employed as a commercial fisherman in Homer, Alaska, when the Valdez Oil Spill occurred in 1989.

Patrick was hired by the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation to perform shoreline surveys. Part of the task involved visually



documenting the spill’s environmental effects.

In documenting the action, Patrick finally found the career path that blended all of his interests. After the work was ended in 1993, he chose to begin photography as a professional pursuit.

Shooting in the Wild

When Patrick began his career, he often was hired by publications to shoot specific locations or capture certain subjects in their element. He also guided many photography tours.

“I’ve guided monthlong trips in Antarctica,” he says. “It’s a lot of work

dealing with the logistics of groups of 100 people. They’re great trips and I’m told by people that I’m a good teacher. I do like the informal, in-the-field teaching experience. We go to cool places and there’s dialogue about life along the way.”

Today, Patrick focuses less on assignment work and more on building a stock photography base that can be bought from his business website.

His works include a combination of wildlife and scenic images, but Patrick prefers landscape photography.

“I like watching wildlife; I like photographing it less,” he says, explaining that living subjects are more difficult to capture. After years of witnessing wildlife, “I really still enjoy watching,” he adds. “However, I would say it’s not quite as cool as the first time. Like in anything else, newness has a little sparkle that is not always repeatable.”

When preparing for a business trip, Patrick prepares two different types of excursions. The first involves outings in his car for what he calls “roadside photography.”

“Alaska’s a beautiful place,” he says. “I have a huge luxury in that so much of the beauty is accessible with just a short foray off the road.”

A photography trip such as this could mean camping for a few days, or a single day’s worth of work. The second, more arduous excursion can mean two weeks of hard, physical labor alone in the wild.

“When all by yourself, you’re suddenly very, very small,” he says. “You have to be much more calculated. All your decisions



Aurora borealis—also known as the Northern Lights—illuminates the night sky in Alaska’s Brooks Range.

Photo by Patrick J. Endres



Bull caribou travel along a mountain ridge in the Alaska Range in Denali National Park.

Photo by Patrick J. Endres

matter. There are so many things that can go wrong.”

He says experienced Alaskan outdoor trekkers are taught to determine if an injury is life threatening or not and to react accordingly by binding broken limbs and treating mild ailments on the trail. An emergency plane ride can cost upwards of \$100,000.

“I feel I’m aware of the risks and try to make decisions wisely and in the best prepared manner,” he explains. “I know (this lifestyle may sound) shocking to many who live in more urban places who haven’t seasoned themselves in a landscape where they’re not 10 minutes from a hospital.”

Business Behind the Lens

Clearing the hurdles of professional photography isn’t limited to physical challenges. Patrick estimates he spends close to half his typical 80-hour work weeks in the field and half at home, editing images and tending to the business side of selling images.

“I have a creative side and an organizational side that cohabitates,” he stresses. “Some photographers are more creative, some more analytical. I feel I have a good combo of both.”

The digital revolution has meant a great change in the business side of photography in the past 12 years, he says. “There’s a degree of automation that happened over time which allowed me to let go of an employee and (still) give me the ability to be out of the office on a day-by-day basis,” he explains.

Some of the changes have meant greater ease for Patrick: cell towers located

in remote areas, being able to save images while away from home and having a website where clients can order prints without human assistance.

Revolutionary new digital cameras also have flooded the market with images for sale and made photography as a hobby a growing business.

“I can tell you, if you looked at 20 (Alaskan) photographers that were alive and active in the marketplace 12 years ago, 90 percent of them have either quit or are guiding photo tours,” he says. “But that’s not what I want to focus on. I want to cultivate the stock photography side.”

Patrick still hosts tours, but on a limited bases. This, he says, gives him the opportunity to maintain his business.

In Patrick’s case, there is also the question of how to juggle a website that sells both fine art prints and stock photos for publication.

“Right now, I think people get overwhelmed on my website with 25,000-plus images and often don’t come to a purchase decision because they get overloaded with options,” he says.

The Future

Recently, Patrick declared himself, “semi-retired.” What does that mean? Only a slight change of focus, he says. With such a collection of works to his name, Patrick is spending less time in the field and more time with his friends and family, including his 17 nieces and nephews.

He is also working on the board of directors of a non-profit organization, Fairbanks Youth Advocates, that opened a shelter in Fairbanks for homeless and runaway teenagers.

Patrick’s future goals, he believes, are an extension of those values he’s cultivated his entire professional life.

“I think the body of my collective photography work does have a voice about me,” he reflects. “I think it would reveal that I value and really appreciate the natural world and natural beauty. It engenders a sense of body and stewardship, of life on this planet, yes, and of other people as well.” ■

To see more of Patrick’s photography or order prints, visit www.alaskaphotographics.com.



A photographer visiting the Galapagos Islands gets down at eye level to photograph a marine iguana.

Photo by Patrick J. Endres

Patrick’s 10 Tips for Aspiring Landscape and Wildlife Photographers

- **Prepare for the physical conditions.** Dress appropriately, and have your camera gear well packed and prepared for the type of travel, hiking or climbing necessary for the task.
- **Research your subject.** Understand and respect a comfortable working distance from the wildlife you seek to photograph.
- **Go for the light.** If possible, scout the area ahead of time and know the lighting conditions: when, where and how the morning and evening light and shadows fall.
- **Use a tripod with a ballhead camera/lens mount.** This will help track and follow moving wildlife.
- **Shoot eye level with your subject.** It helps portray a more natural scene of the animal in its environment.
- **Examine your compositional frames and evaluate the full area of your image.** Tunnel vision is a bad habit easily acquired when shooting moving subjects, especially with long telephoto lenses common in wildlife photography.
- **Have accessible backups.** Have extra film, digital storage media or batteries readily accessible should a quick change be necessary.
- **Experiment.** Use telephoto frames, but back off to capture the animal in its environment, too.
- **Be patient.** Do your best to blend enjoyment of being out in the natural world with the sheer persistence and patience often necessary to capture the image.
- **Be weather wise.** Inclement weather can provide situations for spectacular photos.