

Get with a pro and start shooting

Workshops help you to focus on capturing what is in your mind's eye

By Diane E. Foulds

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Bereft of open range and Yosemite-like peaks, New England might have left Ansel Adams feeling stymied.

"We just don't have that landscape here," says Bruce Barlow, a photographer based in Swanzey, N.H., who has spent 25 years working in large-format film. "Our landscapes are smaller, more intimate, and I think maybe a little easier to do really well."

Easier for him, perhaps. But if you're new to photography or switching from a 35-millimeter film camera to digital, a little guidance can be a good thing. The truly dedicated shooters sign up at Maine Media Workshops in Rockport, probably the best photography school in the Northeast. Its offerings range from digital darkroom to portraiture, with degree programs that include a yearlong professional certificate course. The shortest course lasts a week.

But the time-constrained need not fret. New England is home to a number of photography pros who step out of the darkroom or studio a few times a year to share their knowledge.

"Most folks need to see better, compose more carefully, edit more ruthlessly, and add structure to their approach," Barlow says. "All that's hard, and mostly comes from making many, many, many pictures."

There's another element, too. Shooting landscapes is like examining the world under a magnifying glass. Most of us don't take the time to study the contours of a leaf or the reflections in a brook. A workshop provides that opportunity. It's an excuse to lose yourself in undistracted visual meditation.

Barlow teams up once each season

with fellow pros Ted Harris, based in Enfield, N.H., and Richard T. Ritter, based in Townshend, Vt. Their hands-on workshops aim to familiarize participants with their equipment's strengths and limitations. Unsure what to buy? You can try out the various large-format cameras they bring

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along. Ritter, who builds and repairs them, is a skilled technician who can remedy problems on the spot.

In May the trio takes groups into the woods of southern Vermont and New Hampshire. In foliage season, they go north to remote Pittsburg, N.H., snapping pictures in daylight and evaluating them after supper.

Another May course traces the movement of water during spring thaws, when melting snow sends torrents rushing down mountainsides. The resulting spray and time-lapse potential form the core of a one-day course, "Photographing the Stream," offered in collaboration with Vermont's Center for Photographic Studies in Barre.

"By varying the camera's shutter speed, the photographer can interpret the water as static shapes or feathery mist, or anywhere in between," says Edward Pierce, the workshop's instructor. "My hope is that my students feel the same sense of calm yet elevated awareness that I find in the contemplating and composing of photographs with water."

Having studied large-format techniques under John Sexton, the Carmel Valley, Calif., photographer known for his black-and-white photographs of the natural environment, Pierce is another

photographer schooled in the American landscape genre exemplified by Adams, yet partial to New England scenery.

The same can be said for David Middleton, a nature photographer and naturalist who will lead camera buffs on a Vermont outing in early June. The author of 10 photography books, he teaches nationwide, occasionally bringing students to his old 200-acre dairy farm in Manchester, Vt. The June retreat is being offered in tandem with The Adirondack Photography Institute, an Ohio-based organization inspired by New York's 6-million-acre Adirondack Park and dedicated to preserving natural spaces "through the study and practice of outdoor photography as a creative medium."

Snow Farm, a craft school near Williamsburg, gives summer workshops taught by Sean McDivitt, who spends his winters teaching digital imaging at the Pratt Institute in New York. The DeCordova Museum School in Lincoln offers instruction on such specialties as twilight photography and natural light portraiture.

In August, Jim Blair, a photographer for National Geographic magazine for 37 years, will teach a two-day course on digital water photography at the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum. The workshop coincides with the museum's annual living history festival, Rabble-in-Arms. People dress up in Revolutionary War garb and sail around in vintage boats, providing a wealth of subject matter.

Caleb Kenna, who shoots for the Globe and The New York Times, teaches Elderhostel work-



shops during the peak of fall foliage. One course, "Vermont in Focus: Moving From Image to Print in the Green Mountain State," takes place in tiny Brandon, Kenna's stomping grounds, using locals as its subjects. Students wander the historic houses, capturing the ebb and flow of daily life. Kenna discusses tricks to photographing architecture and people, while Middleton leads expeditions into the nearby Green Mountain National Forest.

Digital is the preferred medium here: Participants are encouraged to bring laptops, which they will use to edit, print, and frame images taken during the day. In the evenings, Middleton and Kenna show slides and discuss their work.

"Traditional photography is a marvelous craft," says Barlow, who admits he is wedded to black-and-white despite digital advances. He also emphasizes the necessity of hard work.

"My favorite photographer-philosopher, Ted Orland, believes that it's better to be hard-working than to have talent," Barlow says. (Orland, based in Santa Cruz, Calif., was a student of and assistant to Adams.) "I agree. And if hard-working means photographing a lot, isn't that what we're supposed to love doing anyway?"

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If you go . . .

Fine Focus Workshops

802-365-7807, 603-632-9193

finefocusworkshops.com

Photographic retreat in southern New Hampshire and Vermont with Bruce Barlow, Richard T. Ritter, and Ted Harris, May 9-11, \$400, plus meals, accommodations, and materials.

Center for Photographic Studies

201 North Main St., Barre, Vt.

802-479-4127

center4photostudies.org

"Photographing the Stream," with Ed Pierce, May 17, 8 a.m.-noon, \$55.

Adirondack Photography Institute

29837 Arthur Ave.

Wickliffe, Ohio

800-598-6374, 216-531-2155

adkpi.org

davidmiddletonphoto.com

"Springtime in Vermont," with David Middleton, June 4-8, \$650 plus meals and accommodations.

Snow Farm: The New England Craft Program

5 Clary Road, Williamsburg

413-268-3101

snowfarm.org

B&W Photo & Digital Darkroom, with Sean McDivitt, Aug. 7-10, \$645.

Lake Champlain Maritime Museum

4472 Basin Harbor Road

Vergennes, Vt.

802-475-2022

lcmmm.org

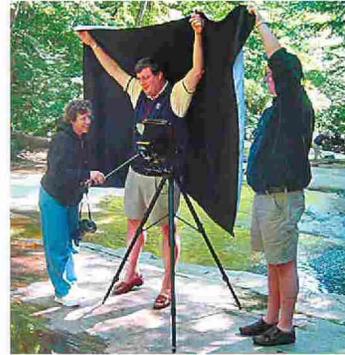
Digital Photography, with James Blair, Aug. 16-17, \$175, plus meals and accommodations.

Elderhostel

800-454-5768

elderhostel.org

"Vermont in Focus," with Caleb Kenna, Sept. 21-24, Oct. 5-8, or Oct. 13-16, \$596.



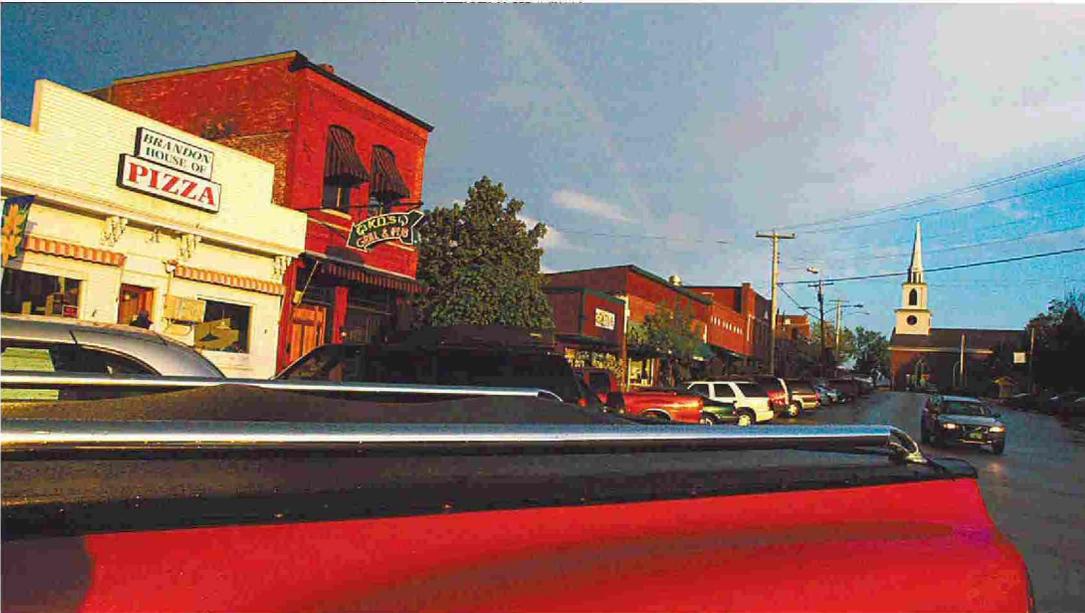
RICHARD T. RITTER FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Arlene and John Bowen work with instructor Bruce Barlow, right, at Stickney Brook in Dummerston, Vt.



RICHARD T. RITTER FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

An 8-by-10-inch (large format) view camera set up on a pond near Keene, N.H.



CALEB KENNA FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

This photographer finds Brandon, Vt., historic, near to nature, and full of framable subjects.