



Across Oregon's Columbia Plateau Region

Multi-hued mounds

and the Painted Hills

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Painted Hills texture and patterns

The Columbia Plateau in Oregon doesn't include the famous Hay Stack Rock or Crater Lake or Majestic Multnomah Falls. However, the plateau region has some of the most photogenic landscapes in Oregon. Oregon's Columbia

Plateau stretches across several tributaries of the Columbia River including the Snake and the John Day River. This area in Oregon is canyon land country.

Hells Canyon is the deepest canyon in America and dwarfs (in depth) the Grand Canyon by some 2600 feet and was carved by the Snake River. If the weather is rainy and overcast make the most of it, photographing country fields or the Hells Canyon overlook. This area is quite rugged and rural, so fields of hay, barns and many cows and horses will be in abundance and can be photographed with a wide-angle lens. Much of the time it is better to photograph landscape scenery with a wide-angle lens and to approach the scene down low. In other words, use a low perspective and include some foreground for the viewer to approach the scene and allow him or her to move through the photograph into the main subject such as mountains or a lake. A person can manage to get some hay bales with some dramatic light on them around mid day. This is made possible because the sun may be mostly obscured by the clouds but peeking through in places. This will make the photographs more appealing





Painted Hills #3

than photographing at mid day and using direct sunlight. If rain is not in the forecast then of course photographing before sunrise or sunset will be an optimal time to photograph the area.

Oregon is mainly farm country in the Northern region. Some of the most beautiful and rugged landscape can be seen, including the Echo Lake Wilderness and along the Echo lake trail. Along the plateau, distances are not covered in miles so much as they are in time. A place is not said to be 70 miles from where you are but two hours from where you are. What may look like a mere hour's drive may actually take twice that just to maneuver the curves of the highway.

Baker City is the town where you want to start photographing Hells Canyon so that if you are short on time you get to see the dam at Oxbow then head north to the Hells Canyon overlook. You will need at least two days to visit and photograph the area properly. From Baker City one can take the scenic Highway #7 and stop in Sumpter. Sumpter was one of the largest mining towns in the area during the time of its heyday when gold was being dredged from the river there. A person could spend quite some time photographing the dredge workings using a lens with a range of 100-400mm and image stabilization. It is amazing how well a lens like that works in low light situations without a tripod. Once at the dredge you will be tempted to stay and photograph more of Oregon's ghost towns in



Dredge bolts



Oregon farmland

Red



Brett Ramsey

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that area, however, it is a long drive to Mitchell, Oregon and the entrance to the John Day Fossil Beds Painted Hills Unit. The journey will take at least eight hours to drive from Joseph to Mitchell with photo stops along the way. This is river canyon land and the road follows the canyons. There are many areas where one can pull off and photograph the river along the road.

The Painted Hills are the result of many layers of rock settling in ancient riverbeds while the area was warm and moist. It indicates that at

one time the climate was much different in the area, giving it the appearance of an other worldly landscape. Think of dried cracked mud only in the multihued sense of the word. The earth feels like soft dried clay but looks stunning. Both sunset and sunrise can produce spectacular results. This photographer used both a wide-angle lens to give an overall sense of the area and a 100-400mm zoom lens, to concentrate on the curves, texture and colors of the Painted Hills. The best time to go is on a sunny day after a rain storm. Rain is soaked up by the earth and brings out all the colors and makes them absolutely vibrant. The drive into the park from the main highway is pleasant and the trails are very mild so lugging a lot of heavy equipment is fairly easy. The longest trail is less than a mile long though one could easily walk all day along the main dirt road looking for compositions of the unique landscape.

Near Hells Canyon



Texture and pattern #3



The Dredge at Sumpter, Oregon

Many hours can be spent in the Painted Hills photographing the varied patterns and colors. With proper planning you could probably shoot the entire area in one day and end up with hundreds of images. Much of the area is facing west so sunset is the better choice although a few of the hills are nicely lit at sunrise. In the evening look for many compositions to photograph the farmland that stretches along the six miles from the main highway into the entrance of the Painted Hills. If time allows visit the other two units of the John Day Fossil Beds before leaving the area. After finishing you will have photographed a large portion of Oregon's Columbia Plateau area. ■



Colorful landscape



Painted Hills tufts

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