



Bannack

A Montana State Park

Old International truck



Entrance sign to Bannack State Park

Shooting at the 2009 annual international conference of the Photographic Society of America (PSA) was definitely a big highlight for all PSA-ers that made the trek to West Yellowstone, Montana. A drive through Yellowstone National Park was an easy way to confirm the vast numbers of photographers

hunting for the ultimate image.

A rare opportunity for some was a bison rolling around on the ground with his fur becoming whiter by the minute. Others were excited when an elk appeared in the river on Friday morning. With long lens at the ready, many PSA-ers were *on that subject!*

Lots of non-animal photographers came to the conference, too. And what do those that prefer to shoot something other than animals do? One might jokingly say, “Punt!” Truth is, we certainly know all PSA members are not interested in animals, don’t own the equipment to shoot nature and don’t care to do so—and even **prefer** other subject matter! Where did *they* go to shoot?

For many years I have had a real interest in Western ghost towns. Oregon has some great examples of ghost towns; Nevada has several towns within easy driving distance one from another and in varying degrees of disrepair.



The upper floor of this building is still used—Masonic Temple (the lower floor, which was a school, is no longer used)

Montana drew me to Garnet and Granite ghost towns over the years. The most well known ghost town of all is really a California State Park called Bodie! I think it is clearly the most photogenic of them all and, in fact, when I have given slide shows over the years the single most popular subject requested for me to present has been ghost towns, *especially Bodie.*

Jean
Timmermeister,
FPSA
Spokane Valley,
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Hotel Meade

For 2009, on my list of ghost towns to visit? Virginia City, Nevada City, and Bannack, all of which are in Montana.

I researched (“googled” and more), made phone calls, sent for brochures, plotted on my Montana *DeLorme Atlas & Gazetteer*—and I made my plans. I checked the conference scheduled meetings, settled on Tuesday and invited a couple of friends to head out north and west, before

daylight. On schedule, the three of us arrived just before the 9 am opening at Bannack State Park—the best preserved ghost town in the west, so claimed because it was occupied into the 1960s and not abandoned as so many others had been, 40-60 years earlier. I grabbed my Nikon digital SLR fitted with my all-purpose 18-70 lens—with polarizer at the ready.

We bypassed a stop at the Park Visitor’s Center



Log house with fenced yard, southern view

*Fenced
boundary
of the park*



while the morning light was good, knowing that we could stop at the shop later—when the sun had climbed higher in the sky. Not much Fall color yet, but the autumn sunlight and the weather was perfect as we walked eastward on Bannack’s main street with houses, stores, church, hotel, a school (with the Masonic Temple on upper floor) and other buildings on either side. A total of sixty buildings, including those behind the rows of buildings on the main road, are in today’s town of Bannack, Montana.

At \$5.00 a carload for non-Montana residents, the visit to Bannack was a non-nature photographer’s dream and a bargain. When gold was found in nearby Grasshopper Creek in 1862, miners came from far and wide in search of gold. The town was important to the state and was briefly the capital of Montana but shortly lost that status to nearby Virginia City. The history of Bannack is fascinating but too long to record here. Learning more is easy (see sidebar).

Bannack was a dream photo shoot and so I planned to stop after the conference on my way home to Spokane. In fact, two days later I was back again—sharing Bannack with five more PSA photographers, with the Bannack Park Interpreter greeting me with a fast “I knew you were coming back soon, but never guessed just two days later!”) The light was different, but again—the quiet September day meant few others were there and no waiting for people to move out of camera range. In short, PSA photographers almost had the



**Jean
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Overgrown yard



A classic look:
Bannack home
with "add-on"

place to themselves at the time of the year of the conference.

And, topping off a morning of shooting, we headed back to West Yellowstone with a lunch stop in the town of Dillon at “*Sparky’s Garage Restaurant*” with its old oil cans made into light fixtures, red oil dip rags for napkins, wrapping the



Detail of typical building

cutlery—plus great food, including sweet potato fries. It was a “don’t miss” fun kind of meal. And, we *did* stop in Nevada City and nearby Virginia City, on our way back to the hotel. Light was not great by the time we reached these two historic Montana mining towns but we stopped—to round out the day’s shoot. By the late September date, Nevada City’s building interiors had been closed for the season to visitors, but the grounds were available to walk and view. Virginia City is a working city while Nevada City has become a fenced town of over 100 historic buildings on its grounds, many coming from other parts of the state.

PSA’s 2009 Conference was great fun and with a bit of history added to the photo shoots north of West Yellowstone—the opportunities were downright special! ■

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Timmermeister, FPSA

- **Bannack State Park**
(located 24 miles southwest of the town of Dillon, on 1254 acres; 60 structures)
4200 Bannack Road, Dillon, Montana 59725
Phone: (408) 834-3413
Website: <http://www.bannack.org/>
- **Virginia City and Nevada City, Montana** are adjacent mining towns on Montana Highway 287.