

Signs of Spring



John Chabalko

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Yosemite National Park

Book content and layout produced entirely in May 2008



YNP: Signs of Spring

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*An initiative conceived by Paul Butzi
Content produced and edited by John Chabalko*

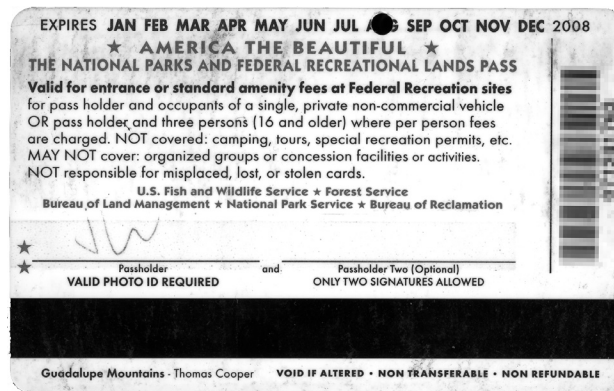
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*Front cover:
The Merced River and
El Capitan*

*Opposite:
Through the Trees: Bridalveil Falls
whipped by the wind*

**** Tonal ranges were tweaked for my
screens and hopefully will be just as
good on yours!*

*Dedicated to the men and women of the National Park Service
for maintaining our nations' spectacular natural resources.*



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Late last year I decided that I was going to participate in Solo Photo Book Month, an excellent idea being organized by Paul Butzi.

I spent a good deal of time over the coming months brainstorming on topics and coming up with several ideas that I thought could be successful. What once had been a quite erratic work schedule has settled down lately allowing me a little more freedom with this project. Of course I decided to do it in May (there was an open 2 month period to complete the project starting April 1 and ending May 31 during which you could choose your own 3[0,1] day period to create the book). During the month of May my work schedule became more erratic, and a couple of previously scheduled trips occupied a some prime shooting weekends.

One theme of spring I've been working on for a while is flowing water and waterfalls. Yosemite is an area



Self-portrait, San Francisco, CA

with no shortage of rivers, streams and waterfalls - all making perfect subjects. The way the water surges through the land creates some spectacular textures on film, whether exposed for an instant or over the course of several minutes.

There is no concise story that this photo book intends to tell but rather it will serve as a portfolio of - at times abstract - interpretations of springtime in Yosemite.

This work is the product of 2 short but relatively productive shooting sessions to the park. The bulk of it was done in a single 4 hour afternoon, the rest taken the very next weekend during a two night stay in Curry Village.

I certainly hope that you enjoy it!

Bridalveil Falls

Every waterfall that I've seen in Yosemite is spectacular in its own way (and I've seen a bunch of them). To stand beneath Bridalveil Falls in Yosemite you can sense its power in the amount of water rushing over its lip, the amount of mist produced by it and the nearly earth-moving roar it makes.

I found myself at home one day with a sudden change in plans leaving me nothing to do that day. Having just commenced this project I decided to make an unplanned trip to Yosemite and see what I would find. About 4 hours later I was standing in the valley ready to go. I had grabbed my camera gear and a sleeping bag in case I decided to spend the night.

Getting such a late start it was already well past lunch time when I arrived, but I still had several hours of daylight in front of me. I parked my car and headed out on foot along the banks of the Merced River. After 3 or 4 hours I had shot a bunch of film and had made several pictures I was happy with.

As the sun was setting and the cold started to descend into the valley I decided to go to the base of Bridalveil Falls to shoot some pictures. I've only been up there a handful of times and usually it's tourist central.



Rainbows at Bridalveil Falls

Fortunately at sunset the tourists had retired to the pizza deck at Curry Village and I had the platform almost all to myself.

Over the next 10 minutes or so I was able to make a handful of images while trying to protect myself and my camera from the water. It didn't work. Both me and all of my gear got completely soaked. As I walked back to the car I was chilled to the bone and didn't dry out until I returned home late that night.



Runoff Steps Below the Falls



Shower of Mist



Between the Rocks



Fallen Tree

The Merced River

The Merced river runs right through the middle of the Yosemite Valley. Over the course of its run it goes from a small seemingly still river to a roaring rushing deadly freight train of water. The large waterfalls that pour into the valley are the only egress points for a majority of the snow melt in the Tuolumne area and after having a big snowfall this past winter the river is beyond swollen.

I have never been in the valley when the Merced wasn't crystal clear. Many times in the spring you can find an area where the riverbed is 20+ feet below the surface; if the light is right you can see the bottom as easily as you can in an area only a few inches deep. From afar the churning water looks peaceful and safe, almost inviting you to wade in and float around in the pools that form every so often. If you stand at the bank and watch for a few minutes you can easily see how powerful it is.

The only things that are immobile are the boulders, many of them larger than trucks. Even the biggest trees that have fallen in and have been stuck in the same place for years bounce around in the flow of the water. The rocks of course have been there for tens of thousands of years and will be there for tens of thousands more. The trees will make it a few more years and eventually disintegrate and flow on down the river.



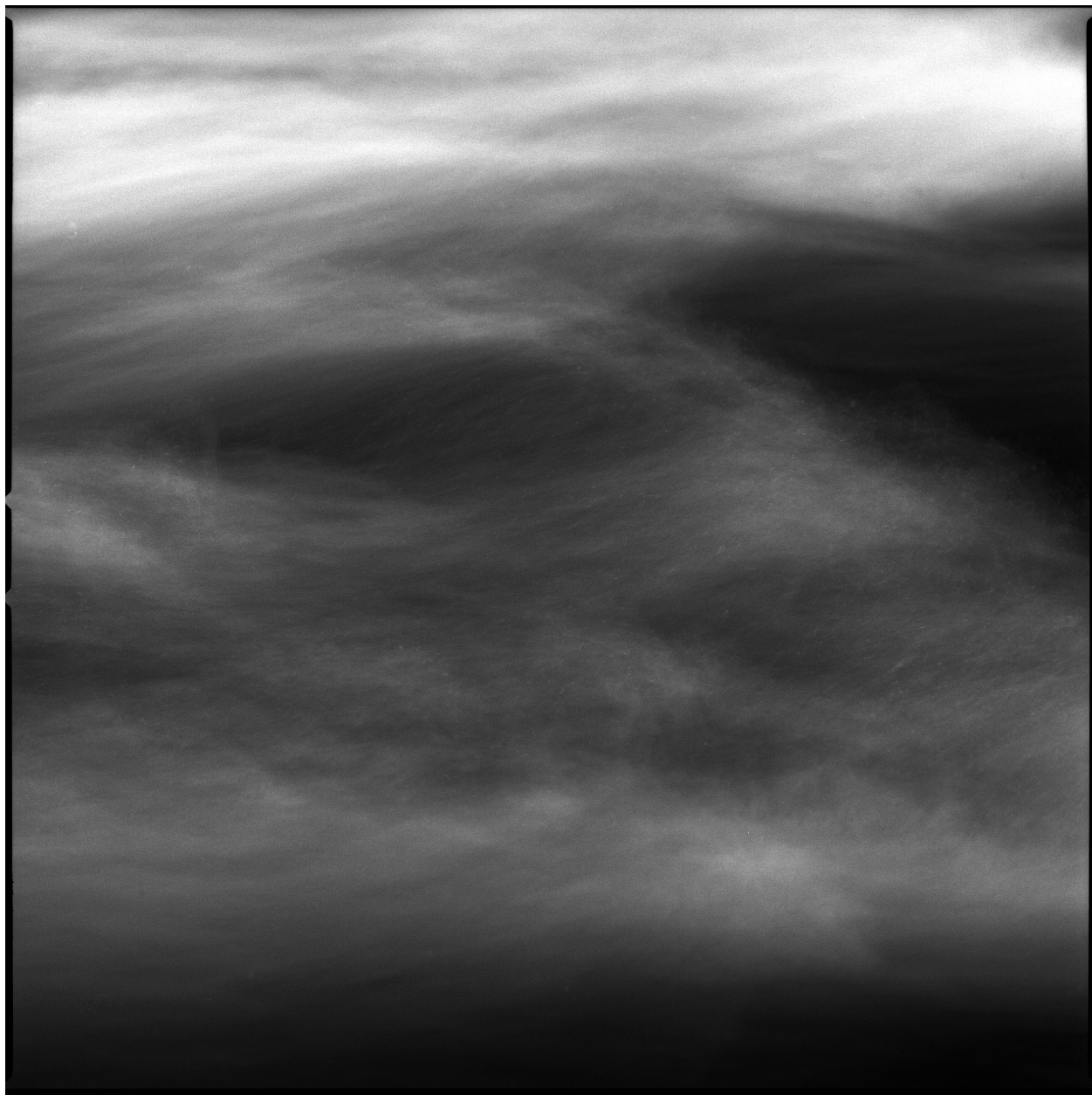
Crystal Clear Showmelt Coursing Down the River

Earlier this year while there was still snow on the ground we took a trip to Yosemite and I remembered to bring my water-proof boots allowing me to stand in the river up to my shin - this isn't really deep enough to do anything interesting, but it allows me to get much closer than normal and put my tripod in places I normally wouldn't be able to - it's probably for the best that I forgot them as there aren't many areas late in the spring where the river is less than 2 feet deep, and it's cold and fast.

This time I stayed back at the bank not wanting to fall into the freezing waters.



Stationary Rock #1



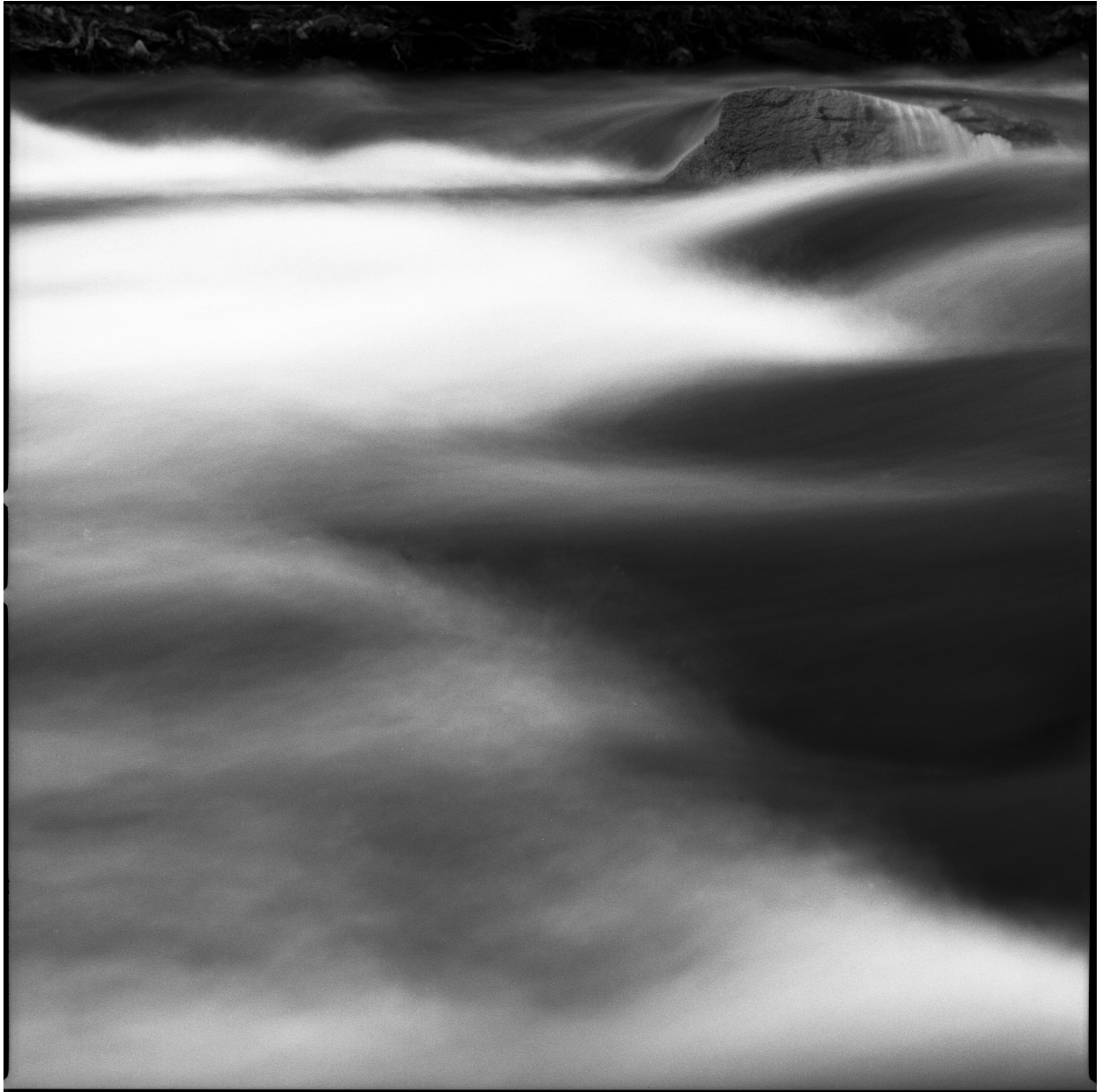
Rapids #1



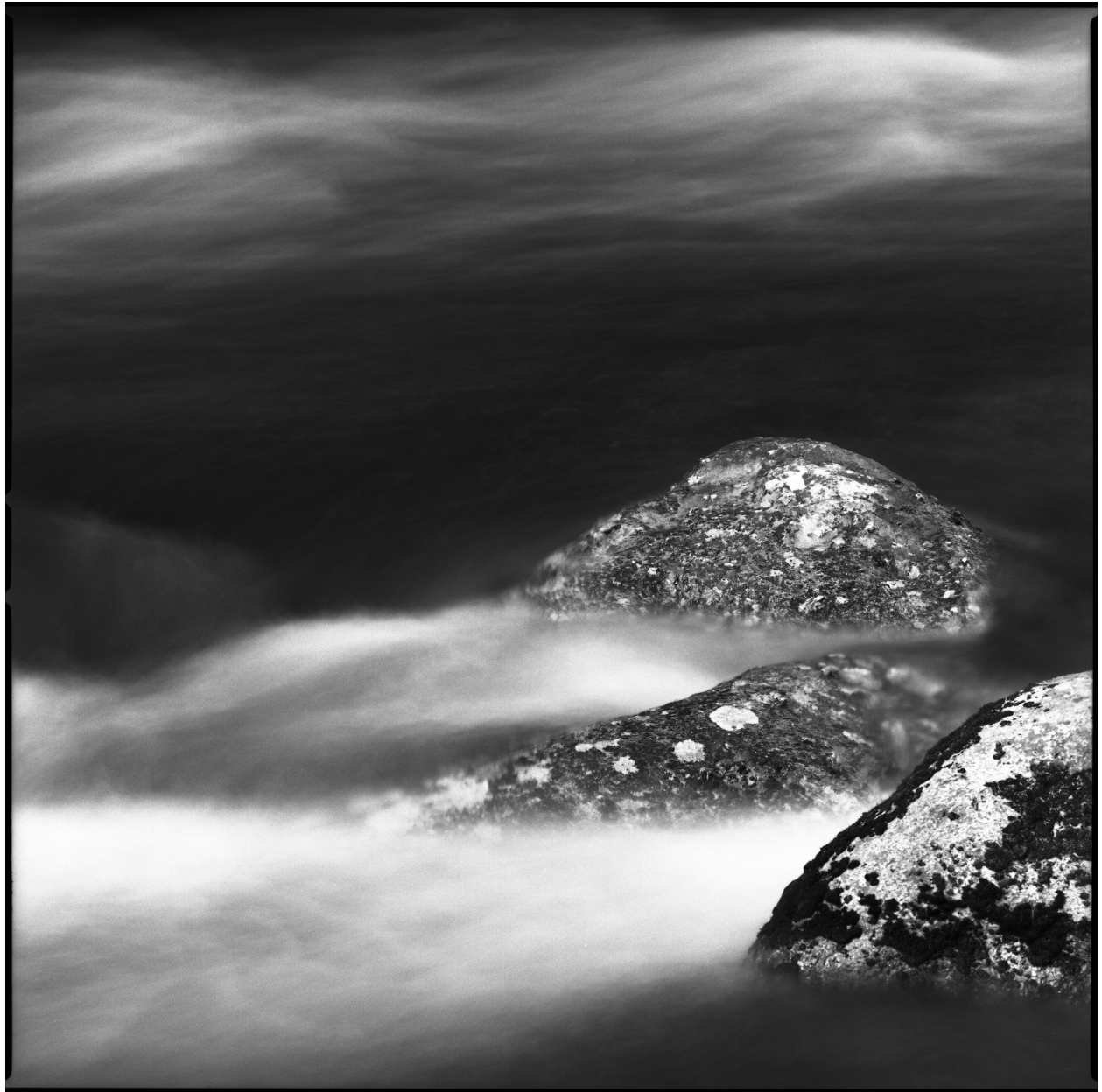
Stationary Rock #2 (Fast)



Stationary Rock #2 (Slow)



Stationary Rock #3



Turbulent Waters



Small Stone #1 (Fast)



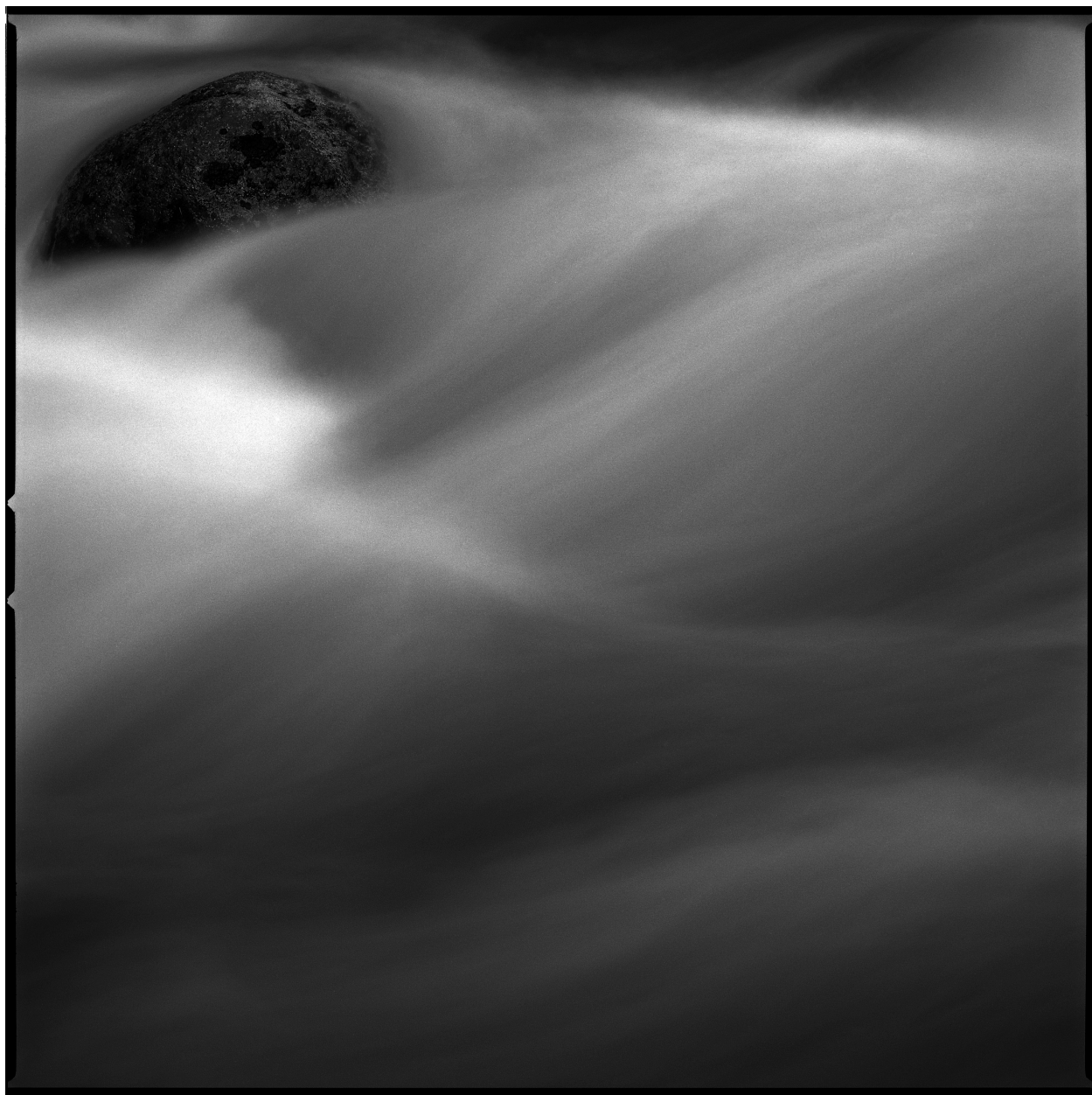
Small Stone #2 (Slow)



Rapids #2



Clear Rushing Water



Stationary Rock #4



Boulder and Log

Dogwood Blossoms in the Valley

For the second trip to the valley I had convinced my friend Jason to come along. We're both used to walking around in the valley with large mechanical cameras, and this trip was no different. Fortunately we left the 8x10s at home this time and could cover more ground. We walked down the Merced to an area we had never been before. In the end it wasn't very far from the road and is right where all of the runoff from Bridalveil Falls meets up with the Merced but there were no other people around.

We had been walking for a few hours and didn't really have any nourishment to speak of other than a few Clif Bars I'd bought at the store. It was hot, there wasn't a cloud in the sky and I had been carrying my 30 pound backpack the entire afternoon.

After stopping under some trees to get out of the sun we discovered a lone dogwood that had just blossomed. I dunked my hat in the river to cool down and we both set off to make pictures of the dogwood blossoms. If anything captures the Yosemite valley in springtime better than Dogwood blossoms I sure haven't found it yet.

After shooting pictures for a couple of hours I started walking around the boulders and



Outtake: Dogwood Blossoms on Burned Tree

found a pocket knife wedged in between two big rocks. I decided to cross the river via a fallen tree getting me to an island with a thick covering of briars and little else.

When we were packing up to leave I took a couple of the blossoms with me to make some still lifes with. When we got back to Curry Village I scouted out a suitable location up the hill and got to work. Unbeknownst to me a bobcat had wandered by our tent and nearly walked into me. Jason saw him and managed to get a cell-phone picture off before he ran away.



Stillife: Blossom and Pinecones #1



Stilllife: Dogwood and Pinecones #2



Dogwood on Burned Tree On the Banks of the Merced River

Closing:

For several years now I have been focusing my work around the most basic photographic principles - this portfolio makes no exception.

All of the images for this book were shot using a Hasselblad 500c/m, a variety of lenses, a Pentax Digital Spot meter, Kodak TMax100 120 film and a sturdy tripod. It all goes in a backpack and I've carried it all over the place. Exposure and development times are calculated using the Zone System. Processing is done in my kitchen sink and negatives are dried on my shower rod. (yikes!)

Every image in this book was composed full-frame (6x6) and is presented that way. This is something I've been doing for a while now. It works well sometimes and not so well other times, but it always forces me to be much more aware of my surroundings, camera level, lens selection and occasionally shows me things that I wouldn't have otherwise seen.

I used consumer/pro level digital tools sparingly in the



Preparation - Dogwood Blossoms Still-life

production of this book. Adobe Photoshop CS3 is used for scanning with an Epson 4990 scanner. I used the clone/rubber-stamp tool for removing dust, levels adjustment and unsharp mask only to make up for some of what's lost going from film to computer. Adobe InDesign CS3 was used for the

layout and formatting of the book, nothing else.

This book, including all content and layout, was produced between May 1 and May 31 2008 in either Yosemite National Park or San Francisco, CA (self-portrait only).

Thanks for reading!

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Created in California