Los Gatos-Saratoga Camera Club News

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OAXACA: Los Dias de Los Muertos

Betty Toepfer Reports

Los Dias de Los Muertos or Day of the Dead is the traditional holiday in Latin countries to remember friends, family and ancestors. In Oaxaca, Mexico and outlying towns, Los Dias de Los Muertos is widely observed.

Thwarted a year ago by protests that had turned violent, Betty Toepfer and Mary Ellen Kaschub rescheduled to go this fall. In October Betty went; Mary Ellen, felled by a shoulder injury, unhappily stayed home!

Led by San Diego travel photographer Jim Cline, this trip's primary focus is to experience and photograph Day of the Dead celebrations and traditions. Photography of the festivities was the focus but there were plenty of photo ops of fabulous churches as well as lots of peeling paint and wrought iron reports Betty.

Some of her favorite sites were the markets. Several trips were made to the big, central Benito Juarez Market, the artisans' market and the chocolate factories where mole sauce is made. "Older people in the markets don't like to have their picture taken," says Betty. "We had to be resourceful, use a telephoto and try to be inconspicuous. One of my trip mates hung a native-woven bag around her neck to hold her camera so it wasn't obvious. (Con't on Page 2)

CLUB NOTES

JANUARY 2008 DATES

7 Color/PJ (prints/slides/ digital); Monochrome prints

21 Program: TBA

ANNUAL AWARDS DINNER AND PHOTO DISPLAY will be held December 17 at 6:30 at the Elks Club. Everyone is encouraged to sign up and bring a dish and a guest. Organizers Doris Vutz and Helen At the event all monthly winners will be displayed and the Club's "Best of 2007" in slide, print and digital categories will be announced as well as the winner of the Carolyn Ramsay Award.

NEW NEWSLETTER EDITOR DICK STUART will take the reigns with the January 2008 newsletter. After four years in which she earned a PSA award for Creativity, Mary Ellen Kaschub is stepping down to serve the Club in other ways: continuing to chair the annual *Art of Photography* exhibit and serving on the Education Committee. "It's been great. I've loved sharing Club members' stories and adventures and getting to know you in the process."

SARATOGA LIBRARY EXHIBIT

North to Polar Bear Country

By Uwe Schmalenbach

I booked my trip in November with Frontiers North Adventures in Winnipeg, also known as Tundra Buggy Tours. There were 17 photographers in a buggy with over twice as many seats. We had four eight-hour days in the buggy on the tundra within about two miles of the "lodge". The driver also was a photographer and a professional photographer assisted.

The lodge consists of seven "cars" on tires five-feet high and four-feet wide. It is parked for six to eight weeks each year about 20 miles outside of Churchill, Manitoba, Canada, right next to the Hudson Bay which was about ready to start freezing over. The sleeping accommodations were bunk beds in two cars for 18-20 people each.

To get there I flew to Winnipeg and from there a chartered turboprop flew me 700 miles to Churchill. Then there was a two- hour bus ride before being taken by the "Tundra Buggies" to the lodge on the tundra.

OAXACA CON'T

"Our hotel was on the Zocalo, or Main Square, where much of city activity takes place. There is always something interesting going on – bands, dancing and during this holiday, alters are created.

"Imagery of Day of the Dead was in the markets and pastry shops; vendors sold marigolds. Art students from the University of Oaxaca created very large sand paintings depicting Day of the Dead with political overtones. Parades and colorful indigenous people added more action and color to the trip.

"The biggest photographic stretch", acknowledges Betty, "was shooting in the cemeteries at night. The cemeteries are old, the graves are jammed together and families gathered to gather, tell stories and pray by candle light. Some people clearly didn't want to be photographed," she says, "but others didn't mind and even offered tamales and drink.

"Working in very low light to get an image without people moving was tough. I shoot film so I pushed my 400 ISO to 800. We all used tripods.

"In sum, it was a great trip with great food and lots to see and photograph. Since we shot a lot at night, we had personal time during the day and I got all my Christmas shopping done.

"This trip ended up being a well-rounded adventure. It's sad though that Oaxaca is still hurting from last year's protests," she concludes.

Note: Photographer Jim Cline offers several different trips to Mexico and Guatemala each year. For more information, visit his website at www.JimCline.com.

POLAR BEARS CON'T

The polar bears here are accustomed to the buggies and approach them to the point of standing up and leaning on them. It's a great way to get frame filling head shots. We had lots of scenes of two young male bears sparring, mothers with two cubs and individual bears lying on the ground, mostly on their bellies, without any special kind of cover. I took most of my shots with the Canon 20D and a 100-400mm lens. Several people had 500mm lenses with 1.4 adaptors.

It was cold. The outside temp was often zero degrees Fahrenheit F, so my hands and feet got cold hen shooting. Foot warmers would have been nice.

A good way to see more images is to go to the website www.tundrabuggy.com. The photo trips are often booked out 1 - 2 years in advance, even though they are terribly expensive. I lucked out with a last minute cancellation.

Virginia's Visual Design Workshop

In November, nine Club members met in a Visual Design Workshop designed to increase their ability to compose effective photographs. The Workshop, organized by Virginia Scott, was constructed around the teachings of Freeman Patterson, author and photographer. "Although a picture is always more than the sum of its parts, the parts are extremely important to the success of the whole", says Freeman. Workshop participants learned the six basic building blocks of effective visual expression: brightness, color, line, shape, perspective, and texture, and how to put them together in images. The use of these building blocks promotes *making* photographs, not just *taking* photographs. More information on Virginia's workshop will be in the January newsletter.

Infrared photo from Harlan Crowder's Ireland series. Go to www.Harlanpics.com Galleries to view *Invisible Ireland*.