

Nachusa Grasslands

Dear ACC members,

Our club has planned a trip to Nachusa Grasslands on the weekend of the 16th/17th. I am including tips to help those who are going get ready ...these tips are something all of us should be aware of if we ever plan on experiencing this type of excursion.

1) equipment to bring...

a) a wide angle lens in case there should be fields of flowers, plus longer focal length lens for close up work (either a dedicated macro lens if you have one or a double element diopter/close up attachment that screws onto the front of a longer/zoom lens to get you up close, or extension tubes that go between the body and lens and make it focus closer...the diopter and extension tubes can both be used at the same time to get even closer)

b)diffuser (translucent/milkyshower curtain liner...cut down...if you do not have an official commercial fold up type), reflector (can be a piece of cardboard with crumpled aluminum foil taped on)

c) wind screen

d) clip close pins, twist ties, string, knitting needle or any rod that can be poked into the ground and then a stem tied to it to stabilize in the wind...also these can help you pull back elements that are annoying in your composition without destroying healthy plant life.

d) lots of heavy duty bug spray for mosquitoes and ticks...this is prime tick season and be sure to thoroughly check your body after the day is over as soon as you can (ticks like warm areas like arm pits, backs of knees, waist, etc), when you return to the motel immediately shake out clothing in the bathroom so that you can see any ticks that fall out,(then kill them/flush them...they are hard to kill...VERY tiny...like little spiders), comb out your hair. When in the field wear light clothing that will let you see the ticks, and have people check your outer clothing before you get into the car. Before going out/spraying stuff pant legs into your socks, shirt into your waist band. Check your body for days afterwards,, ticks can be transported into your car and you can pick them up a day later.

e) rain gear...don't shy away from rainy conditions just be prepared...when there are showers is often the best time to do flowers because there is likely soft light. We do not want a bright sunny day. Bring rain pants or pants that dry quickly (jeans are not the best since they stay wet) ... even if there is not rain there could be a lot of moisture due to early morning dew (which photogs love). Shoes should be the kind that will not get ruined by getting wet...a dewy morning can leave your whole lower body sopping wet.

Etiquette

We are being invited by the Nachusa volunteers and we need to be very careful how we treat the area ...since destruction on our part will likely make any future clubs and photogs very unwelcome. Never rip up plants...you may remove a strand or two of dead grasses that are in your composition...but need to be sure that these are not of value). Grasslands full of flowers are fragile especially if a dozen people go stomping around on the terrain. There are likely no real paths except for the two track roads that take us into the enormous area. If there are no paths it might be best for our group to spread out when entering the grasslands.... spread out so that groups are not all in one area creating a huge trampled area. The temptation is for everyone to shoot the same flowers because they appear to be the best and thus that area

gets severely trampled. When you walk out into the grassland watch where you step trying to step into more barren areas. If the growth is thick/high sometimes shuffling your feet so they stay under the growth is better than stepping down from the top which means you definitely stomp on plants. Once you have chosen an area you want to work you can easily wipe out the whole area if you have brought all your equipment and need to set it (especially a back pack) down (smashing lots of plants). Consider this ..leave your camera bag at the road edge and take only the body and lens you expect to use putting accessories in your pockets (photography vests are nice to have). Getting down on your knees (you often want to be parallel to the flower) may smash a lot of growth likewise. I have a small camp stool that is designed for photos and attaches to my belt...sitting on that stool gets me down low (remember you need to be parallel to a flowers major surface when shooting up close because depth of field is minimal when magnification is great) . Instead of my knees being on the ground only the three legs smash plants minimally.

I will likely not be able to get out into the grasslands myself but will be available (perhaps at the road side) for advice and now especially with digital capture you can feel free to show me what you have done and ask advice.

Remember: a) make sure the subject you have chosen is the best you can find (has lots of potential, a good specimen/group with no flaws and with a surrounding background that can be easily controlled into something pleasing (using proper depth of field), and b) work the image thoroughly ...keep checking your depth of field and point of focus, exposure, and redo images until you feel you have perfected every aspect because macro shots are VERY hard to get perfect....too often I come home frustrated because the focus/depth was not just right...and end up kicking myself that I did not try harder to not leave a good subject until I was sure I "nailed it". You are likely not going to see sharpness on your LCD...more likely you can see it through the viewfinder...be sure you know where depth of field preview is on your camera...and watch the background of each shot carefully to eliminate annoyances while you are in the field....Do not get the mentality that I will fix it in Photoshop.. Depth of field is not something you are going to "fix in Photoshop". If you are not getting all aspects sharp try a higher f stop number or backing up to reduce magnification...you can re crop when you print.

There is no guarantee that we will be at Nachusa when conditions are right..that the flowers are there and profuse or that the weather is ideal. Still such excursions are important because they teach us what the area is like and allow us to practice so that when the perfect opportunities do arise we will be far more skilled...learning from past mistakes. Take it from one who knows, getting really great wildflower shots takes quite a bit of practice and lots of mistakes which make us better the next time...no matter how many times we are told...we do not remember to apply until we have experienced the frustrations first hand.

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