

Upon arrival at 6:30 am, it was still a bit dark and the western horizon was just starting to turn blue. We were expecting storm clouds to come in by early afternoon and intended to get off the water by 11 am. Looking over the mangrove canopies at the put-in I could see those typical vertical columns of cumulus clouds that would pretty much cover the rising sun this morning. I could see some blue where the clouds did not cover the sky, so I hoped for some dramatic sunrise scenes with the cloud this morning as the sun began to peak over the horizon. For the occasion I brought my tripod.

I have two tripods, one is a cheap version used mainly for point and shoot cameras; it's lightweight and I've only used it with my Canon Powershot. I took it on several overnight trips into the Everglades and it was great having it for those early morning or late evening shots. I captured some sweet sunset moments in the gulf last year having that tripod along at our campsites. Since purchasing the Sony, I have purchased a professional grade tripod (Manfrotto 3221WM) and ballhead (Manfrotto 488RC2) and have thus far only used it a couple times. I've used it at Crandon Park, once with the 18-70mm lens to shoot some landscape shots and the second time with the 300mm lens to get some early morning shots of birds. I don't want to spend too much time here talking about tripod experience, but I do have some thoughts on the matter that I'll share in another journal. But for now, I decided I wanted to take the tripod out there today and use it in the water.

Blackpoint is a mangrove peninsula along the coast line that isolates a very beautiful lagoon near the Blackpoint marina. The nice thing about the put-in is that canoes and kayaks have their own area, separated from the busy marina by a very long jetty. The canoe put-in is in a creek that follows the jetty for about ¼ mile and leads into the large lagoon, protected by the jetty on one side and blackpoint peninsula on the gulf side. This makes a very nice area for kayak fishing and it stays relatively shallow, too shallow for large powerboats. Occasionally you'll see a small flats point in there, but not often. As you paddle the creek along the jetty, you can hear the loud noises of the powerboats and people walking along the jetty. Soon you come out into the openness of the bay and as you direct your position toward the gulf, you get some of the most beautiful sunrises over the blackpoint peninsula. My intention was to capture the sunrise from this vantage point.

I loaded up my boat and today I had my camera with the 18-70mm lens attached securely in my pelican case, the 300mm telephoto lens inside two dry bags and the tripod in a garbage bag. I headed out to the lagoon while the sun was barely making itself known as the heavy clouds scattered across the horizon. There were a few opportunities for the orange rays of the sun to peak through the clouds, providing some texture to the sky. I paddled out a little ways until I found a good spot to set up. I first anchored and then got the tripod into the water along side the canoe. At this spot, the water was about 2 feet deep. I got out of the boat and expanded the tripod so the ballhead was about neck level. Once the tripod was securely standing, I started fumbling around getting the camera out of the pelican case. In the meantime, the boat was drifting a bit and to my frustration, managed to hit the tripod and knock it over into the water. I know I'm clumsy and knew that I would not put the camera on the tripod until I was firmly planted next to the tripod. So while the tripod was now fully submerged and exposed to salt water, the camera was still safe and dry.

I had taken a couple towels with me on this day, thinking I could use one on my lap with the camera. I grabbed a towel and wiped off the tripod and ballhead as best I could. The sun continued to rise and was now sending a dramatic orange hue over the horizon with the dark clouds splaying out in all directions over head. I needed to get set up quickly. With the camera strap around my neck, I attached the camera to the ballhead and once it was secured, I let the strap go. Now I was ready. I set up my aperture at f16, set the ISO to 400 in aperture priority, and turned off the image stabilizer. It's recommended that the IS be off when the camera is on a tripod. I learned this at Jack Roger's workshop and never questioned that wisdom. But I later asked the question, "why does it need to be off?" Apparently, it has something to do with feedback when there is no movement or shake, such as in the case with a tripod. And the feedback

causes motion or vibration, thus adding blur to the otherwise sharp picture. So, I keep it off when shooting with a tripod. No problem there, right?

I took several shots as I panned across the horizon back and forth. I wanted to get series of photos that I could stitch together for some panoramic scenes. Here's one of those shots, with 3 photos stitched in PhotoMerge (the software that comes with Adobe Elements 4.0). The land jutting out from the left is the blackpoint peninsula.



I was happy with the results and as the sun continued to rise and started washing out the sky, I put the camera and tripod back into the boat and jumped in. Now, I would detach the zoom lens and get my telephoto in place. By now, the morning sky was lit with a soft morning glow that is perfect for shooting birds along the mangrove shoreline. It was low tide about 1 hr before so the birds were lining up along the shoreline feeding. The mangroves were now capturing that golden sun light that makes their leaves glow. I attached the teleconverter to the 300mm lens and carefully exchanged the zoom lens with the telephoto, and placed the lens caps and zoom lens into the pelican case. Great, everything was dry and secure and I had my camera and telephoto on my towel-covered lap and I was ready to go.

I headed over to the mangroves where I could see the white feathers of ibises, egrets or herons. I hung out with an immature little blue heron, an adult little blue heron and a yellowcrown nightheron for about 10 minutes. They shied away and would not let me get more than 80 ft or so from them. The lighting on the mangroves was striking so I took some shots to capture the foliage and the roots and not so much the birds. Here's one shot that shows the effects of low tide when there is a good distance between the mangrove roots and the water. This little blue heron looks so small under all those mangrove roots.



I noticed a cluster of white birds a bit farther away and decided to check them out. I thought for sure they were ibises, but as I got closer, I noticed that they were snowy egrets, except for one ibis and one immature little blue heron. All white, they blended together. I got as close as I could (a couple birds flew away) and anchored about 100 ft away. After a few minutes I moved in some more and did this a couple more times getting closer each time until I was about 40 ft away. I stayed there for while watching and

shooting. There was one snowy egret who seemed to be the dominate bird of the group and would frequently puff out his feathers when another bird got too close. He would chase the other one away in this puffed stance. I was able to capture some of this display and here's one shot.



After some time I decided to leave this group of birds and venture over to an area where I had seen several wading birds last year at this time. I haven't seen any birds there since and figured now that winter was coming in, maybe they would be back. This area is hidden behind a couple mangrove islands and I drifted in between a couple islands being very quiet. The birds were not there but the lighting on the mangroves was beautiful. I am particularly drawn to the reflections on the water and decided to take some shots as I drifted along. The water is caramel color and some of the mangrove leaves are golden, it just makes a beautiful blend of browns, yellows and greens having various shapes and textures. I thought I would get some shots and play around with some abstract compositions, maybe use some artistic styles in Adobe Elements to see what I get. Regardless of the final outcome, I could drift in my canoe for hours looking at the mangroves and not doing much else. Here's one of those shots. I used the "Posters Edge" effect on this one giving the hanging grass more contrast.



I headed out across the lagoon toward the blackpoint peninsula and decided to round the corner and head to the gulf side. The winds were strong as I rounded the peninsula, coming at me from the north. I

paddled for about ½ mile and perused the shoreline. The water was a bit choppy, making photography more difficult from a boat. There was an occasional wading bird, shorebird and kingfisher flitting about, nothing remarkable. After awhile, I turned around and headed back toward the lagoon, letting the wind carry me along. I noticed something that stuck out from the browns and greens of the shoreline, it was large and blue. It's not uncommon to see washed up debris along the mangroves, so I didn't think a blue object was unusual. Until I saw it move. It was a blue crab, and it must have been one foot wide, easily. It was absolutely stunning. One of its claws was very large, almost the size of my hand and it was in defensive mode when it noticed me and started scuttling into the mangrove roots to hide. I got a couple shots from about 30-40 ft away and continued to get closer as it ran into hiding. It found a nice spot and even when I got out of the boat, I could not get into any good position to shoot the crab's entire body. The lighting was very poor as well and all I could see was his large claw and a couple eyes sticking out above. It stayed there and had no intention of moving, so after exhausting all possibilities short of scaring the animal out of hiding, I got back into the boat and left him alone. Here's a shot of the crab before he went into hiding.



By then, my kayak fishing friends were in the lagoon, tiring of chasing permit fish all morning. I hung out with them for awhile and decided to go back over to the mangroves near the creek entrance. This is the area where I was shooting birds earlier and decided to look around for them. By now, they would be perched higher in the mangroves or deeper inside the roots as the water levels had already increased at least a foot with the in-coming tide. I found some ibises and a juvy nightcrown heron hiding in the branches. I managed a couple of shots which turned out quite nice. I captured enough light on the eyes to get a good shot of an ibis and a juvy nightcrown heron. It was time to head back to the put-in.

Later at home while downloading the photos I started thinking about the fact that I had shut off the image stabilizer for the tripod photos. I got a bad feeling in my gut as I looked over at the camera. Sure enough, I never turned it back on. Dang it! I knew that would mean fewer good shots to choose from. But, as I went through the photos and picked out the sharpest ones, I found that with a little sharpening in the Sony software, the photos turned out quite well. None of the flight shots, except for one lucky shot turned out, so my successful flight shot ratio dropped from 1 out of 10 to 1 out of 100 without IS. Another lesson learned. I plan to experiment with the tripod and compare shots with and without the IS. If I can't see any appreciable difference, the IS stays on all the time!

And last, here's a shot my friend took of me while I was in the water playing with the tripod. It gives a good view of the lagoon, with the jetty in the distance.



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