

# Photographing Waterfalls

by Robert Hitchman

Taking an exposure reading of a waterfall is never easy. Expose for the falling white water and you will underexpose your film. Take a reading off the dark, wet rocks and your meter will probably over estimate the amount of exposure necessary for the scene. You could average the two readings and split the difference. Or you might decide to use your camera's auto-exposure-matrix- meter setting and just hope for the best.

There are several methods that will insure more accurate exposures of your waterfall photographs. An incident meter will read the intensity of the light falling on your scene. It will not be fooled by the light reflecting off your scene. But if you are standing in the wrong place, your incident meter may not be reading the same light falling on your subject. You may be standing in the shadow of the trees, and your subject may be out in the sunlight. I prefer to use a spot meter, hand-held or through-the-lens, and take a selective reading (1-3 degrees) of the light reflecting off the **BRIGHTEST** area of the scene. Not one of the pure white reflections or the glare on the water from the sun, but an area that has some detail and a bit of texture-an area that you'll want to reproduce as slightly darker than say, a piece of white paper. If you take a meter reading off that brightest (but not pure white) area of the scene in your viewfinder and then increase the indicated meter reading by two stops, that value will be correctly exposed. If the darkest areas of that same scene fall within a four-stop range, there will be visible details in the shadows of your photograph as well. This is the method I use when exposing color transparency film. If the highlights of my slides are overexposed, they go straight to the wastebasket



When I'm shooting color negative film, I do just the opposite. I take a spot reading of the **DARKEST** shadow area that I want to be reproduced with a slight amount of visible detail (not pure black) and underexpose by two stops. The old axiom of "expose for the shadows and print for the highlights" still works. Unfortunately, the lighting range of most forest scenes lit by direct sunlight is usually more than four stops. Add the white spray of a waterfall and wet, black volcanic rocks to your scene and there can be a seven to ten stop difference between your highlights and your shadows.

Photographers experienced in darkroom techniques can compress or expand the range of their black and-white film's contrast by reducing or adding time in the film developer. Not so easy when you're shooting color negative film. That's why I recommend that you save your film for the cloudy days, the rainy days, and the locations where your whole scene is in shadow. Nature photographers looking for forest scenes hope for a thin overcast or a cloudy day. An open, luminous light dispersed and diffused by fog is ideal. Waterfalls flowing northward, in the shadow of the mountains, especially during the winter months are most easy to photograph. Skylight and warming filters will remove the blue cast reflecting from the water and the wet rocks. A polarizing filter will cut the glare of the sky on the foliage of deciduous trees around the falls.

*For the past seven years Robert Hitchman has published the Photograph America Newsletter*