

Shaver Lake Fireworks

Introduction

Potential Photography subjects

- Primarily commercial fireworks display

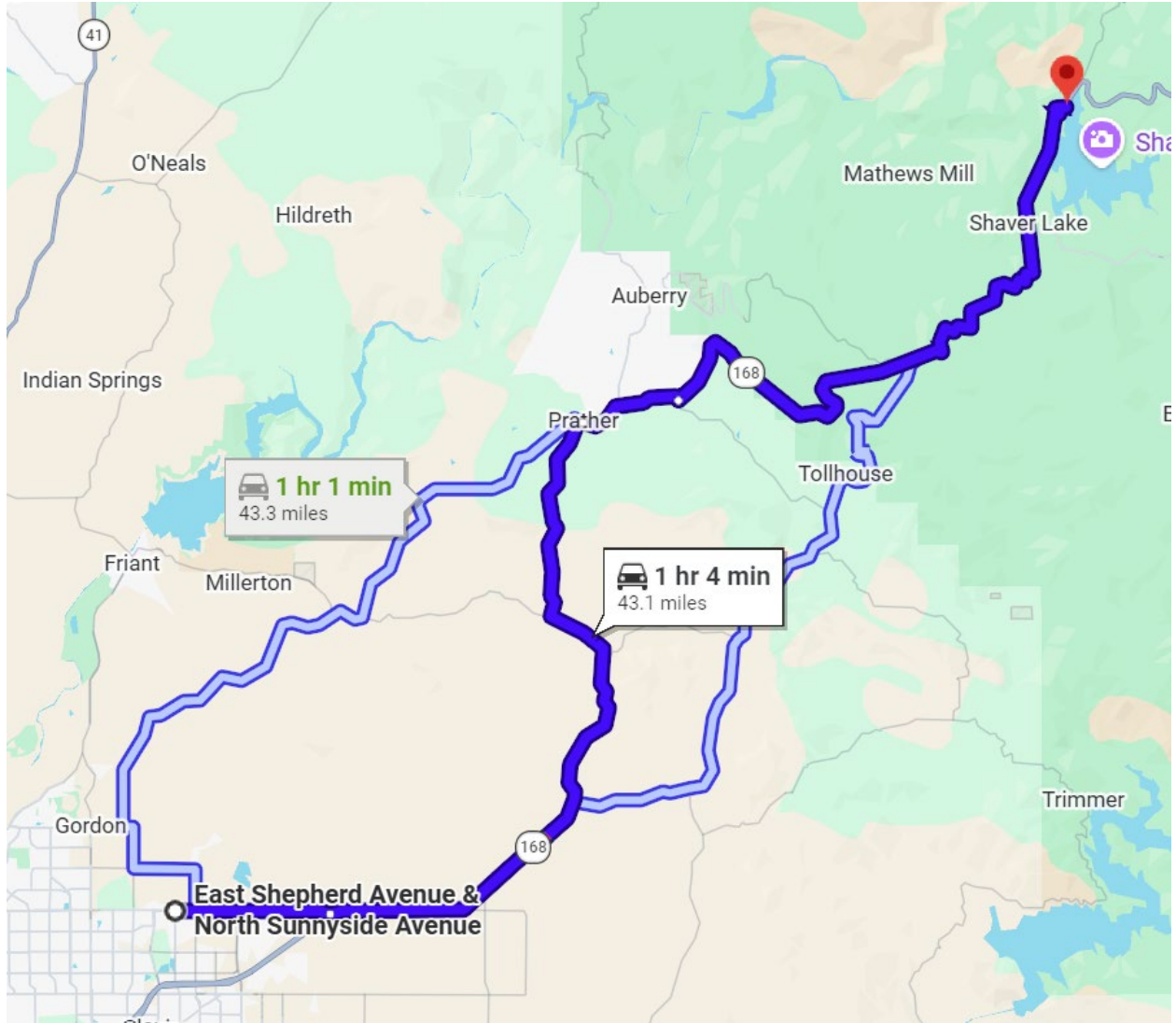
Potential Photography Skills to practice

- Shooting in the dark
- Long shutter speeds and exposure
- Pre-setting exposure parameters
- Capturing intense light in dark environment
- GPS coordinates: 37.1468, -119.3026

Trip Logistics

Field Trip Date	July 1, 2026, Wednesday at Sundown (about 8:30PM)
Costs	None anticipated
Carpool Meeting time & location	Dry Creek Trailhead, Shepherd and Sunnyside, S/W corner. Meet here at 5:30 leave no later than 6:00
On site Meeting time & Location	Arrive at North end of the Shaver Lake Dam at about 7:00 PM. The even normally lasts about 2 hours.
Gear recommendations	Tripod, 24-70mm and/or 70-200mm (or close variation thereof) lenses, headband light.
What to bring	Water and snacks

Map



Photographing fireworks in the dark

I'm sure many of you have had the opportunity to photograph fireworks in the past or have at least reviewed the technique in one fashion or another. There may, however, be some of you who have not had the chance to do either. For those, this article is for you.

As in many activities, there is always more than one way to achieve the same end. I am going to describe the method I have successfully used in the past. You may have a different technique. As long as you achieve the desired objective, all is good.

So, most often, fireworks are an "after sundown" activity. Consequently, we are working in the dark and the only real exposure light we have available to us is the light created by the fireworks "process" and any other ancillary lights that may be in our frame. As an example, if there are reflections or other "constant" lights like lamps or floodlights in the frame, those lights will appear in the exposure. (See the provided example image for clarification.)

The guiding idea is to have the camera prepared in advance so that all you need to do is trigger your shutter at the beginning of the fireworks display, that the shutter is open long enough to capture all you want it to and that the aperture and focus are set properly to get a clean crisp exposure. Because you will be shooting against a dark background and the majority of the light that will affect your sensor is that which you want to capture, the setup process is pretty easy.

The best way I can convey this preparation concept is to describe the settings I use (generally) when photographing fireworks. But an important part of this preparation is testing your settings ahead of time to see what your camera is going to like.

Your lens choice should be guided by how far from the fireworks you will be and that the "field of capture" (I just made that up) is large enough to capture the fireworks display from liftoff to full explosion at the top of the projectile flight and the subsequent "flower" of light caused by the explosion. More than likely, you will have to watch the first few "shots" through your viewfinder to make the appropriate adjustments. (Again, look at the example image to see what I'm talking about.)

Exposure time will be relatively long. I normally start at 5 seconds per exposure but you should review your first set of exposures to see if it needs adjustment.

Keep your ISO setting as low as possible. I usually use the native recommended setting here. It is usually 64 to 100.

Because you want to optimize your field of focus using a small aperture (remember higher the number, smaller the aperture) works well. I usually start at $f/22$ but you can adjust as

needed. Keep checking your captured images and adjusting your settings until you get what you want.

The use of a tripod is almost mandatory to get good images. You can try it handheld but I think you will be disappointed.

There is normally a launcher and/or other apparatus at the point of origin of the fireworks shots. I set up my focus (pre-focus) on that point and leave it there in preparation for the exposure. By that I mean I set the camera's focus point on an object at the point of origin of the fireworks and set focus to that point so that the flight of the rocket is tack sharp in the exposure.

Lastly, you can use an exposure delay to prevent camera shaking but I don't find it necessary. The ascent of the projectile is erratic enough to disguise any initial shake associated with the shutter release. Once a second has transpired, the camera is normally steady.

So here is the timing: have your camera properly set to be focused on the starting point of the projectile. As soon as you see ignition, press your shutter release once and let it capture its flight and explosion. Adjust your settings, as necessary.



