

ART CAN PERSIST ON THE ROAD

A Photo Essay

By Aaron Brame

In April, my brother and I hiked Bright Angel Trail from the rim of the Grand Canyon to our campground, which sat on a tributary of the Colorado River near Phantom Ranch. After two nights there, we made the difficult ascent up the canyon wall on the South Kaibab Trail. Here's why I decided to carry two vintage film cameras with me on this journey, instead of just taking pictures on my phone, and what the experience taught me about answering the muse.

Photographs are important to me. Always have been.

So, when my brother called me last December and told me that he'd finally gotten hold of a backcountry permit to the Grand Canyon, and that he and I were going to be hiking *the whole thing* in a few months, the first thing I realized was that I was going to have to get my ass in shape. I also knew that I had to figure out the best way to take great pictures during my trip.

There was no way in hell that I was going to climb down a mile-deep canyon and spend two nights in the remote backcountry, fighting off snakes and whatnot, just to come back with some pictures to flip through on my cell phone.



I shoot the old-fashioned way. I make my photographs by hand. My tools are the old cameras that expose light to film, the chemicals that transfigure film into negatives, and a scanner that digitizes my negatives and brings the images on them to life.

I wanted to be creative on my terms during this adventure, even though I knew it was going to take some extra effort and planning. Here are some lessons I learned about bringing my artistic practice along on the adventure.

Tip 1: Keep it Inexpensive

You wouldn't take money to Vegas that you're not prepared to give to a blackjack dealer, right? Well, you shouldn't take cameras with you on a strenuous canyon hike unless you're ready to see them get smashed at the bottom of some ravine.

I couldn't take my rarest or most expensive cameras on a hike like that. So, I chose two smaller ones that I thought could survive the journey, and that wouldn't break my heart if they didn't. Here's what I packed:

- One Diana medium-format from the late 1960s or 1970s (\$40 on eBay).
- One Olympus Trip 35-millimeter point-and-shoot from the 1970s (\$80 at an estate sale).
- Enough color 35-millimeter and 120 film to cover me (\$93 online).

My entire photography kit fit into a single pouch in my pack, weighed only a few pounds, and cost less than a decent GoPro kit.

Naturally, I still had to pay to have these rolls processed and the images scanned, but this low-cost approach served my purposes well.

Tip 2: Keep it Simple

When you are on a long hike, you quickly learn to strip down to the essentials.

My brother and I would be traveling 17 miles round-trip over four days, with a 6,000-foot difference from the rim to the bottom. I'm talking about punishing sun, sweat dripping into your eyes, buzzards circling overhead—all of that.

I wasn't going to be stopping to meter for light or wait for the sun to drop down just a few more degrees, so I quickly leaned into the limitations of the simple tools I had. The Olympus takes sharp, vintage-looking shots and is close to indestructible. It was perfect for capturing