

Photography on the Water

by Carl Haensel

Shooting photos of outdoor scenes can be challenging. From speeding boats to underwater fish, there are many variables regarding photography around streams, rivers, lakes and ponds. Here are a few tips and tricks to make the most of photography during your time on the water.



This photo of a paddler at dusk captures some of the nuances available when shooting photos on the water.

photo - Carl Haensel



A polarizing filter can produce totally different photos of the same location with different colors, shadows, highlights and effects.

photos-Carl Haensel



Cameras and equipment

While there are hundreds of cameras on the market today that can take acceptable photos, to make the most of your on-the-water experience, a digital SLR (single-lens reflex) camera is an optimal choice. The ability to add a polarizing filter, which will be discussed later, is the key to many water-based shooting opportunities. If you've got a digital point-and-shoot, it can work as well, but with some limitations. Try to use one with a larger diameter lens. This gives the camera better image quality and light-gathering characteristics. The ability to adjust the shutter speed and ISO settings on a camera is also useful to make the most of water-based photography opportunities. For cameras without these options, they often have scene selection settings.

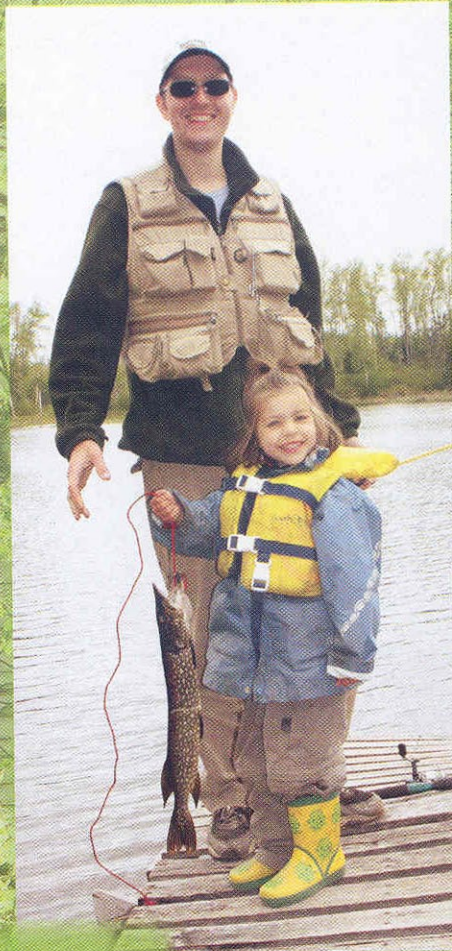
Subject matter

Knowing your subjects and having your camera prepared for the shot will help your photos turn out well at the end of the day. To be successful, you'll need to change the settings on your camera to match your photo's subject. Set your camera to use a high shutter speed, over 1/200 of a second and faster, for photos that contain lots of movement. If you're shooting in low light, many cameras allow adjustment of the ISO setting. Though it will degrade the image quality significantly on some cameras, a setting as high as 1600 can be used to capture action photos in low light settings. Moving boats, skiers and tubers, anglers casting and people holding fish all fall into this category. For cameras with scene selection options, the action setting is often appropriate. Avoid using a low light scene selection, which will usually distinctly lower the shutter speed while

raising the effective ISO setting, leading to a photo that is not reproducible at a useful size. If you plan on shooting photos of scenery, waterfalls or stationary subjects, try using a slower shutter speed and a lower ISO setting. A tripod can be handy for these types of photos to lend stability. For use in the field, there are monopods that double as hiking staffs for photographers on the go. If you forgot your tripod at home, try stabilizing the camera on a tree, bridge, dock or whatever is handy. These techniques will lead to a better photo, especially if you're planning on enlarging the final product.

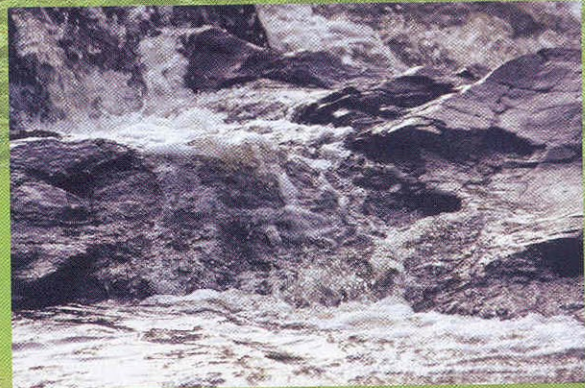
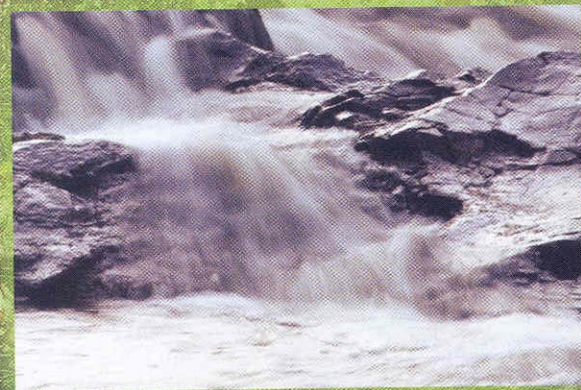
Framing and composition

All of the basic rules of photography apply to shooting photos on the water. In the case of many water photos, the rule of thirds can be a key to having a good-looking photo, since a shoreline or horizon line can often be apparent in scenery shots. When lining up your shot, look to place the shoreline or horizon line either one third above the bottom of the photo or below the top. If you're shooting quickly and this does not happen, remember that editing the photo on your computer can sometimes help as well. If you're shooting a photo of an individual on the water, try shooting down from above to provide a simple background of water for the photo. This works great for anglers trying to disguise the secret location of the big fish that they've caught. If you want to show where you are, include the shoreline or horizon in the photo. Avoid including power lines, poles or other utility infrastructure in your photos, which may distract from the subject matter.



These two photos show the difference a fill flash can make in a successful photo of a young angler.

photos-Carl Haensel



Use a tripod to capture photos of moving water in a low light setting near dawn or dusk. These two photos show the difference between shooting at 1/3 and 1/200 of a second. If you're looking to show the softest side of moving water, shoot near dark in a setting like the same photo on page 29 shot for 6 seconds.

photos-Carl Haensel

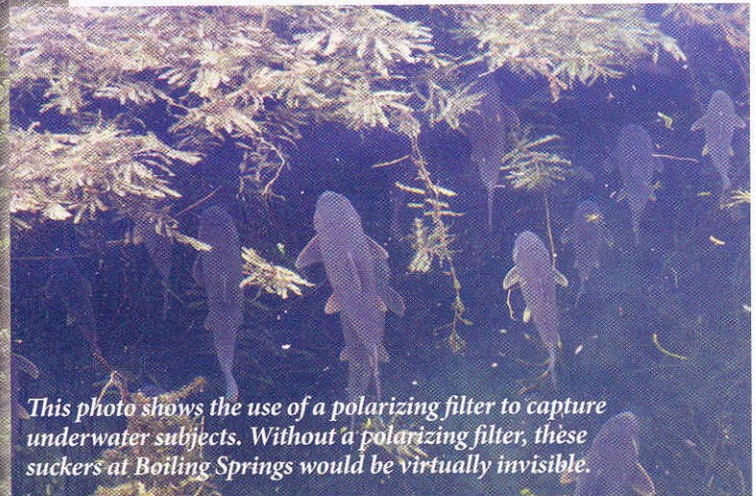


photo-Cindy Haensel

Try shooting at many different angles of your subject to get the best shot. Be creative in how you line up your shot, and take the effort to get the best angle.

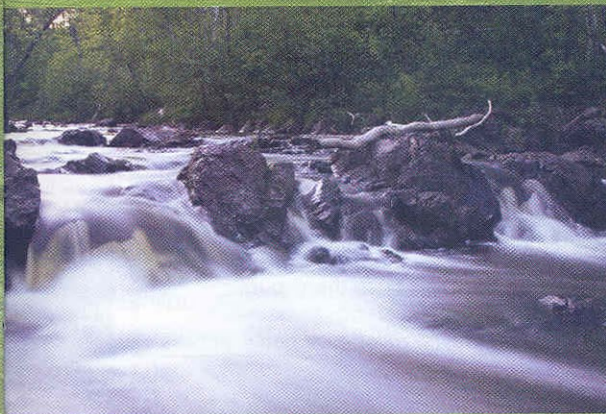
Reflections on the water

Reflections are both the gift and the curse of photographers shooting near the water. Soft light can add artistic reflections to some shots, while glare and harsh sunlight bouncing off the water can ruin an otherwise great photo. Use a polarizing filter to remove the glare that is on the water if that is your goal. Keep in mind, however, that this can also remove scenic reflections as well. You can also use a polarizing filter to shoot subjects below the surface of the water, such as fish, vegetation or other items that may add interest to your photo. Try shooting photos with your polarizing filter positioned multiple ways for different effects. Photographers looking to shoot reflections on the water will find that trying multiple positions using a tripod will work well. If you're wearing polarized sunglasses, take them off when shooting photos involving reflections for a truer viewfinder image.



This photo shows the use of a polarizing filter to capture underwater subjects. Without a polarizing filter, these suckers at Boiling Springs would be virtually invisible.

photo-Carl Haensel



Subject position

If you're shooting a photo of an individual on the water, shadows and glare can be challenging. Start by having the sun at your back and try using a fill flash. Both of these techniques can avoid the shadows that often occur when shooting photos of people in bright sunlight. If you're shooting a photo of someone holding a fish, make sure that you're not so close to the subject that the fill flash is overdone. Back up and zoom in instead. Have the subject hold the fish in a well-supported manner with their hands behind the fish to avoid obscuring it. If you plan on releasing the fish, hold it over the water in case it squirms free. To make a distant object appear closer to your subject, back up as far as 20 feet or more from the subject and zoom in as much as possible. This will create the illusion that your subject is closer to the distant object. Photography near water offers excellent potential for warm-colored, low light photos. Try to arrange your subject with the sunrise or sunset at your back to take advantage of the warm glow of dawn and dusk. □