

The Forgotten Season: Winter Photography in the Mono Basin



Poconip ice fog shrouds Mono Lake, with just a sliver of sun illuminating the base of Black Point. Photo by Joe Decker.

Joe Decker
January 13–15, 2017

\$275 per person / \$250 for Mono Lake Committee members
enrollment limited to 15 participants

Winter in the Mono Basin: There is a “visual quiet” that complements the silence marking this season in a most remarkable place. A lifting morning poconip fog, tufa towers jacketed in snow and reflected in the mirror of the lake’s surface, ice sculpting crystalline filigree along creek and lake banks. Come share in the wonder that provides a very different photographic opportunity.

This photography field seminar will be based in Lee Vining, near the shores of Mono Lake. We will explore various locations along the lake and photograph the serenity and beauty that is the Mono Basin in winter. The Mono Basin winter landscape can be both dramatic and sublime—the Sierra Nevada is thoroughly covered in snow, and the lake is noticeably empty of life.

Though primarily a field seminar, we will discuss composition and methods of proper exposure under the diverse variety of lighting conditions encountered during winter in the Eastern Sierra, visualization, filtration, and developing a personal vision. The seminar is for the enthusiastic color and/or black-and-white photographer using either digital or film media.

All ability levels are welcome. **A fully adjustable SLR camera (not a point-and-shoot camera) is strongly suggested** but not required, along with an extra battery or two and enough memory for 1,000+ images at your selected resolution. A tripod will be a necessity for our nighttime work. A working knowledge of your camera's controls and functions is very important: *DO NOT BRING A CAMERA YOU DON'T KNOW!*

Instructor **Joe Decker** is a longtime Mono Lake Committee supporter and photographer whose work has been widely exhibited across the United States, from the San Diego Museum of Natural History to the Smithsonian, as well as having been recognized with residencies as diverse as Arizona, Iceland and Antarctica. Joe's award-winning book on photographic composition, *The Tuesday Composition*, is published by Flatbooks Publishing. Joe has led numerous workshops in the western US, and has studied with master nature photographers Galen Rowell and Frans Lanting.

ITINERARY

(subject to change based on weather and road conditions)

Friday, January 13 at 2:00pm: Meet at the Mono Lake Committee Information Center & Bookstore in Lee Vining. After brief introductions we begin our dialogue on photography as a means of both documentation and also personal statement, as well as discussing techniques for night photography. A field session at sunset will be followed by dinner, after which we will return to the field to photograph by the light of the moon. (Sunset–4:59pm. Moonrise–6:46pm.)

Saturday, January 14: We will photograph sunrise by the lake, breakfasting together afterwards, and then begin to share work at the Mono Lake Committee. We will return to the field, likely to Lee Vining Canyon for winter vegetation, aspen and meadows. A lunch break will precede a sunset location shoot. Dinner this evening will be an optional, but very popular special meal catered by Linda Dore, former chef at the Mono Inn and Nevado's in Mammoth Lakes, who now runs Epic Café, Lee Vining's newest restaurant. Significant others are welcome—in fact encouraged—to join us for the celebration. (Sunset–5:00pm. Moonrise–7:50pm.)

Sunday, January 15: We will meet at sunrise at the lake to capture the dawn light. We will spend the rest of the morning photographing at locations to be determined by available conditions. A late morning adjournment will allow for the drive home in the afternoon.

WEATHER AND ROAD CONDITIONS

Weather conditions will either be challenging or very cooperative. January average temperatures in Lee Vining are 41°F (max) and 20°F (min). Average January snowfall is 17.5 inches. Relatively warm and sunny days are possible, but prepare for colder, wintry weather. Bring layered clothing in case of pleasant midday sunshine. Poor weather may require more challenging photography and patience, but it may also provide more photographic possibilities!

Highway 120 (Tioga Pass) will be closed for the winter at this time (as will be Highway 108, Sonora Pass), so plan on seeking alternate routes if you are coming from the Central Valley, western Sierra, or Bay Area. Highway 395 rarely closes except during a severe winter storm. If you don't have 4WD with snow tires, you need to carry chains in case of winter weather. There is a possibility of significant travel on ice- or snow-covered roads so please be prepared.

Thirty-year January climate data for Lee Vining, along with road and weather information can be found at *monolake.org*. There will be no refunds or credit of tuition for weather-related reasons.

ALTITUDE AND DEHYDRATION CAUTIONS

Remember to bring (and drink!) lots of water because your body loses more water at the higher altitudes of the Mono Basin. Experts recommend that you begin drinking extra water as you drive to higher elevation in order to prevent dehydration and headaches. Also, the sun is rather fierce at high elevations, capable of burning even on cold and cloudy days, so be sure to protect yourself thoroughly using sunscreen and sunglasses.

MEALS

Taken together if at all possible, but not included in the tuition. Participants should pay Linda Dore directly by check or cash for the Saturday dinner (\$28).

FEES

The cost of the seminar covers tuition only. Participants are responsible for all other fees:

- **lodging accommodations:** visit *leevining.com* to make reservations
- **all meals:** breakfasts range in price from \$3–\$8, lunches \$4–\$10, dinners \$10–\$25
- **Saturday's dinner:** \$28 check or cash should be paid directly to Linda Dore
- **South Tufa fee:** the \$3-per-person entrance fee to South Tufa is good for a week; 80% of it stays at Mono Lake for improvements to interpretive/educational activities
- **Old Marina fee:** the \$3-per-car-per-day fee enables Mono Lake's state park to stay open

TO BRING

- ___ five examples of your work (see below)
- ___ a USB thumb drive to enable sharing of the photos you take during the weekend
- ___ extra camera batteries to keep warm in your pocket
- ___ note-taking material or tape recorder
- ___ pocket-size flashlight
- ___ travel alarm (some motels have no wake-up service)
- ___ cameras and lenses you normally use
- ___ memory cards/film
- ___ tripod
- ___ a watch or other device for timing long exposures
- ___ sun protection (even though it's winter, we're at 6,000–8,000 feet above sea level!)
- ___ warm winter clothing
- ___ snowshoes (**optional**—these may be useful at some field locations to help you navigate snow cover and increase your photographic options)

Students are encouraged to bring at least five examples of their work. These can be in the form of snapshots, slides, or fine prints (color or black-and-white), or digital format. Digital format should be as .jpeg files, preferably on a USB thumb drive—no personal laptops for viewing. Students working in black-and-white might also benefit from bringing negatives and/or contact prints of the finished prints they present. We will also try to view the photos everyone takes during the weekend, and those should be in .jpeg format on a USB thumb drive.

A letter will be sent to all registrants with a more specific list and updated information approximately two weeks prior to the workshop. For more information, visit Joe Decker's website at *joedecker.net*. Email questions to *joedecker@gmail.com*.



Mono Lake Committee Field Seminars

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