

Glacier National Park

Following
the Light

By Varina and Jay Patel


eBOOKS
VARINA & JAY PATEL



Following the Light

© Varina and Jay Patel





Glacier National Park offers some of the most beautiful landscapes in the United States. I spent several years of my childhood living in the Rocky Mountains, and returning to them feels like going home. A trip to Glacier is a return to my childhood - evergreen forests, crystal clear lakes, cool mornings, and sudden storms...

... And then there is the light.

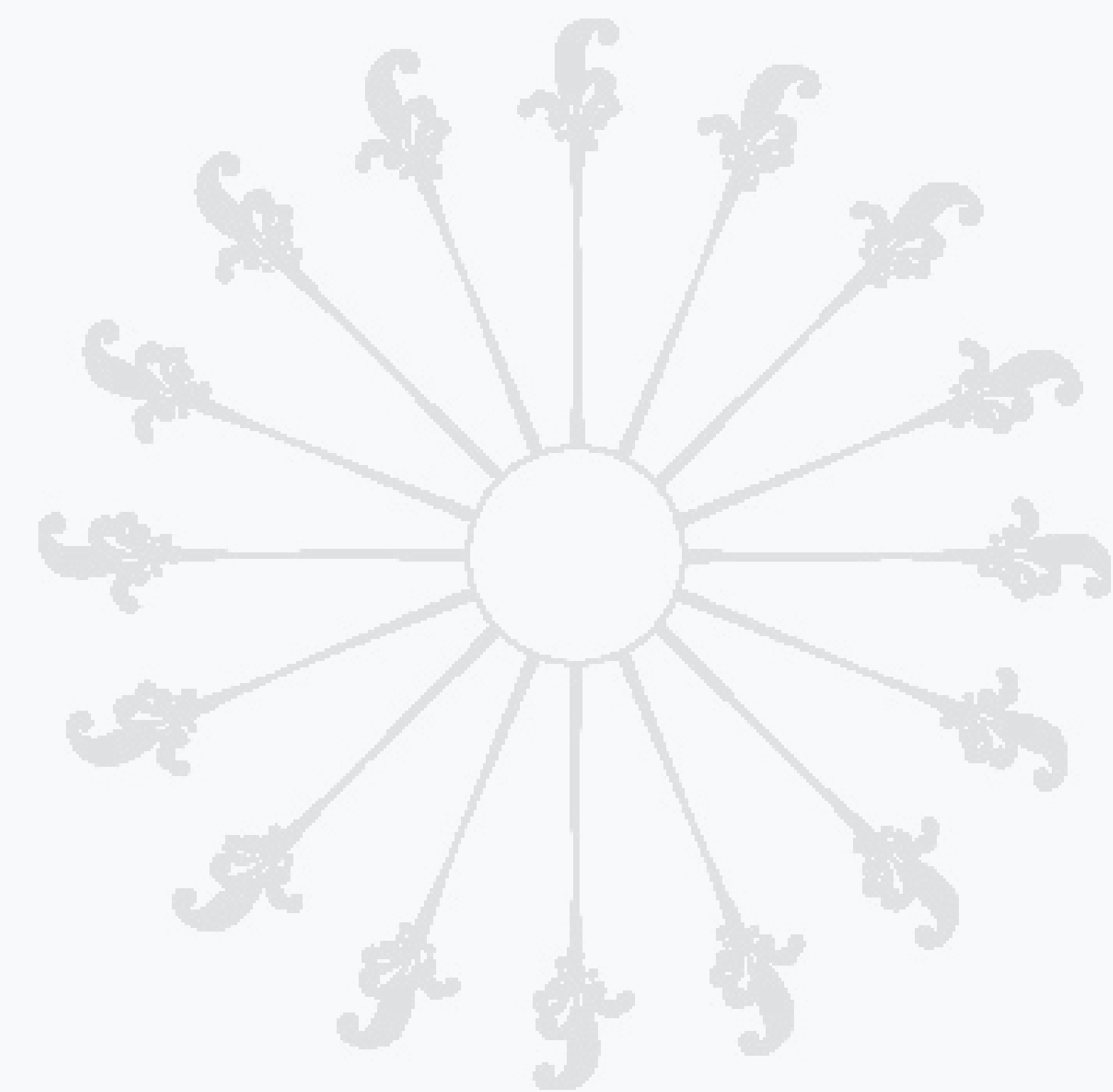
Afternoon thunderstorms are very much a part of Rocky Mountain weather. Check the skies in the morning, and you're likely to feel pretty good about your prospects for a nice, sunny day... but bring a rain jacket anyway, because chances are, the weather is going to get interesting. Thunderstorms roll in as the day progresses... and where there are thunderstorms, there are *thunderheads* - glorious, billowing clouds that make a photographer run for the camera.


We spent our first afternoon at Glacier scouting locations. Shooting late in the afternoon is generally taboo for wide-angle landscape photographers, and we use this time to look for locations that might make good shots under better lighting conditions. However, there are exceptions to every rule – and in the Rocky Mountains, you are likely to run into some pretty darn spectacular exceptions just before or after a thunderstorm. We set up our cameras near St. Mary Lake as sunbeams streamed through the clouds overhead, and the soft storm light danced on the textured rocks all around us. The images we captured can only offer a glimpse of the astonishing beauty of the light through a storm.



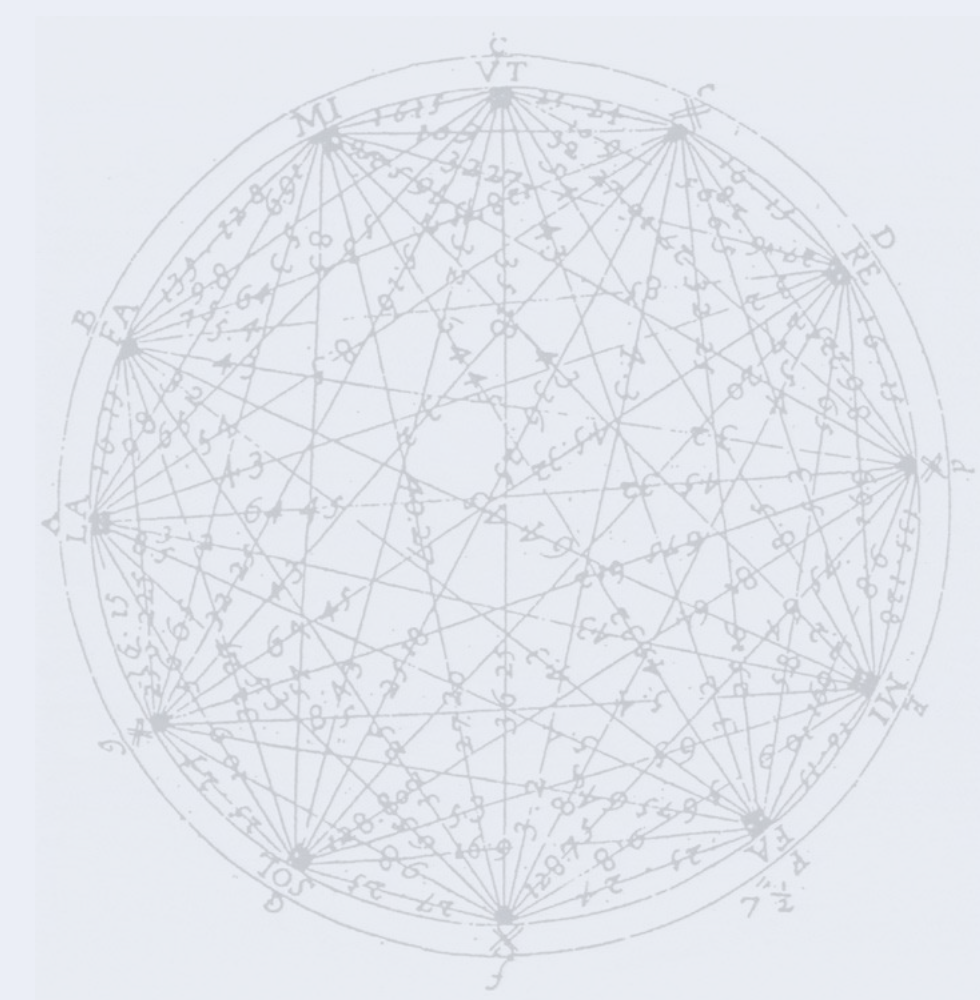


As the sun dropped toward the horizon, we began to watch the sky in search of clues to where we'd find the best evening shots. Tonight, the decision was easy. There was no doubt that the best spot was along the main road in the park – the aptly named “Going to the Sun Road.” Gaps in the cloud cover allowed sunlight to bleed through in bright beams. The misty remains of the recent storm softened and reflected the light, creating a lightshow the likes of which I'd never seen.





And just when we thought it couldn't get any better, it did. The sky opened further, and deep golden sunlight flooded the valley. There is nothing more satisfying to a landscape photographer than choosing the right spot under a stunning sky.



The following morning, we rose early. We chose to set up our equipment near Sun Point on St. Mary Lake in hopes of capturing the early morning light on the mountains. The clouds created a beautiful backdrop and we hoped they would provide us with some nice colors as the sun rose behind us. Once again, we were not disappointed. Going to the Sun Mountain blushed red in the early morning light, and the clouds followed suit. So far, we had been lucky twice... and it wouldn't be the last time during our stay in Montana.

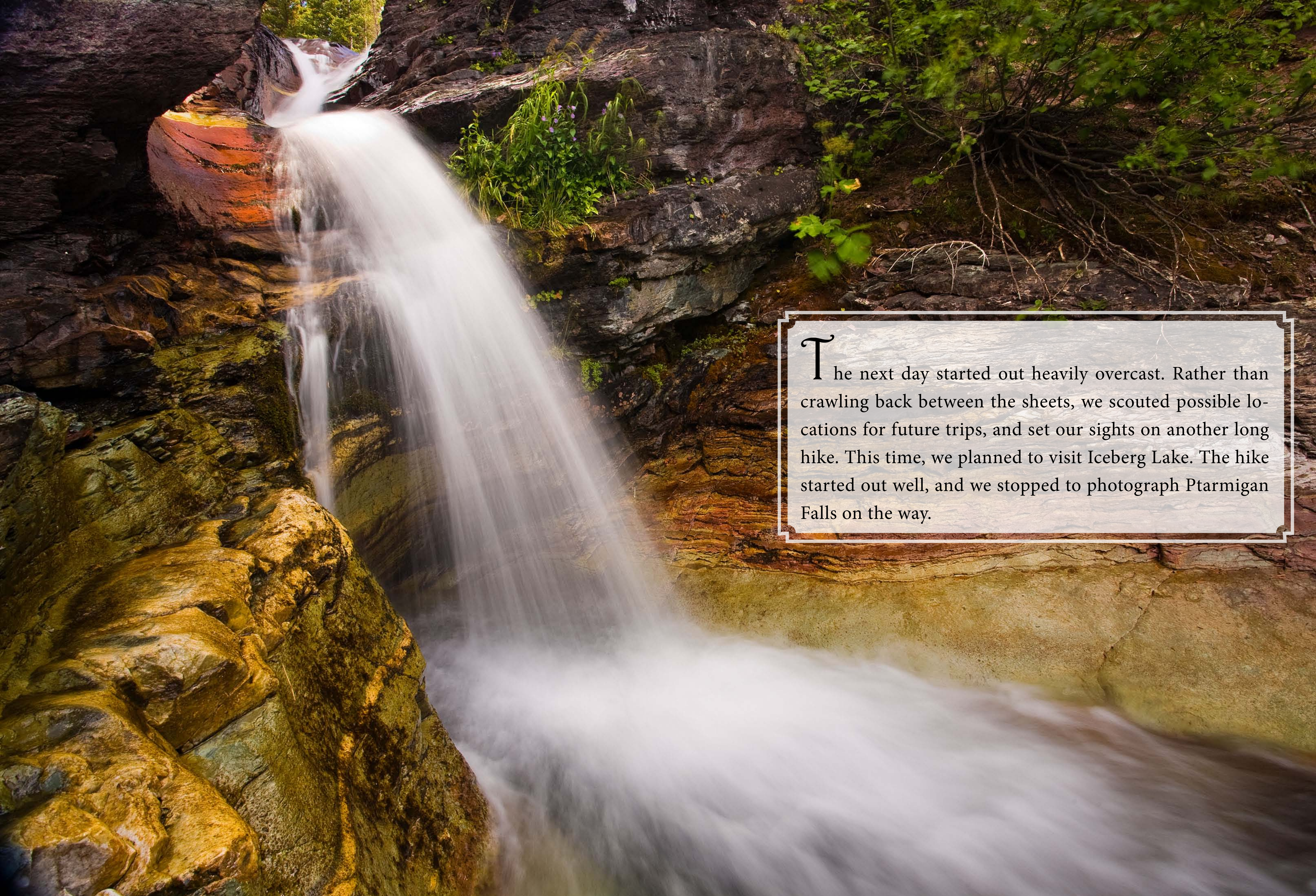


Our plans for day two included a hike to Grinnell Glacier – 11 miles round trip with an altitude gain of about 1600 feet. We took a few shots along the road to the trailhead at Many Glacier. Mist on Lake Sherburne provided a beautiful setting and a welcome break from driving. After a brief stop, we continued on our way.


The trail to Grinnell Glacier is breathtaking. Our pace was fast, since we wanted to spend as much time at the top as possible - and we wanted to have time for photography on the downward trip as well. From the top, we could see three jewel-colored lakes far below us, framed by steep mountainsides and green forests. We explored the area around the glacier - enjoying the cool water and the crisp air.

As we began our downward climb, I slipped on the steep, rocky path and fell hard. My camera never touched the ground, and although my ball head received a new dent, it was none the worse for wear. I was surprised to discover that I felt no pain other than a dull ache in my leg. This seemingly minor injury was exacerbated the following day... but for the time being, all was well. We photographed Grinnell Lake on the way down and arrived at the trailhead well before dark. Our feet were tired, but we were ready for more.





The next day started out heavily overcast. Rather than crawling back between the sheets, we scouted possible locations for future trips, and set our sights on another long hike. This time, we planned to visit Iceberg Lake. The hike started out well, and we stopped to photograph Ptarmigan Falls on the way.



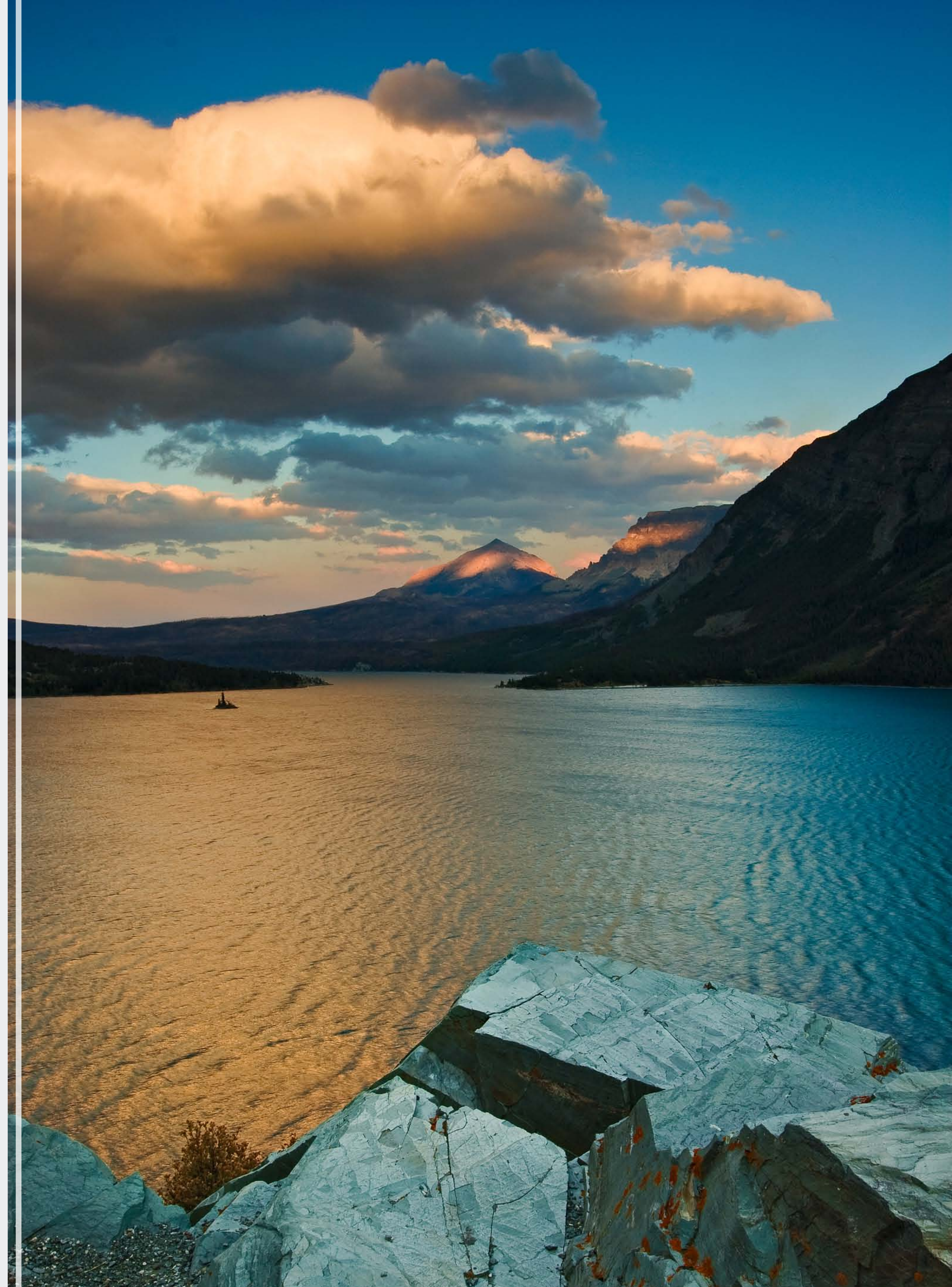
The 4.7 miles trails gains about 1200 feet in altitude. When we reached the top, we were disappointed to discover that the icebergs had melted already – but what Iceberg Lake lacked in icebergs, it made up for with sheer beauty. Passing clouds made patterns of light and shadow on its turquoise surface that defied belief. We waited in the cold wind for openings in the clouds, and finally – satisfied with the results of our patience – we returned to the trailhead.

Unfortunately, while stepping down from a large rock, I pulled a muscle that I had aggravated the day before on our hike at Many Glaciers... and something snapped. The pain was so intense that I was unable to hike at our usual pace. I couldn't lift my leg effectively, and I gasped each time I bumped my foot against a rock. It took three times as long to descend 4.7 miles as it had to climb the same distance. I did make it back to the car, but my leg continued to cause me pain for the rest of the trip – and for weeks afterward. Despite the injury, we did take a few more pictures... and we even completed a couple of short hikes in the time we had left.



Our love for photography is a passion for light. Wilderness photographers negotiate with earth and air for a place under spectacular skies. We rise early and go to bed late. We hike for miles, and we wait - despite intense heat or numbing cold - only to climb back down in the dark without getting the shot... because the light wasn't right.

A trip like this one makes all the planning, the work, the waiting (and in this case the pain) worthwhile. Glacier National Park is a fantastic place. The Montana earth and its breathtaking sky are inspirational.





Enlightenment
© Varina Patel



Canvas
© Varina Patel



Sunbeams
© Varina Patel



Painted
© Varina Patel



Heaven's Gate
© Jay Patel



Waiting for Sunrise
© Jay Patel



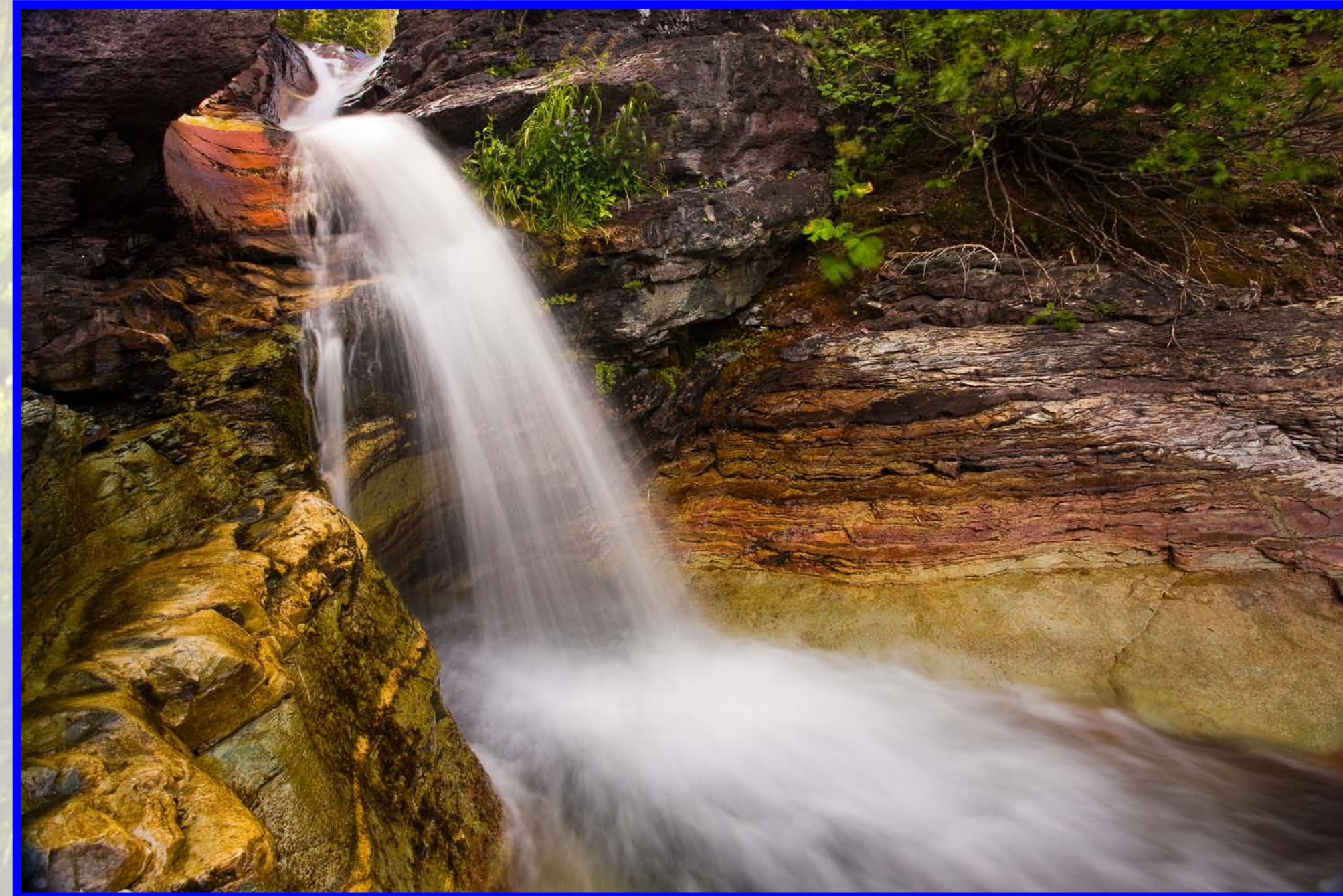
Sunrise over St. Mary
© Varina Patel



The Sentinels
© Varina Patel



Jewels in the Valley
© Varina Patel



Ptarmigan Falls
© Jay Patel

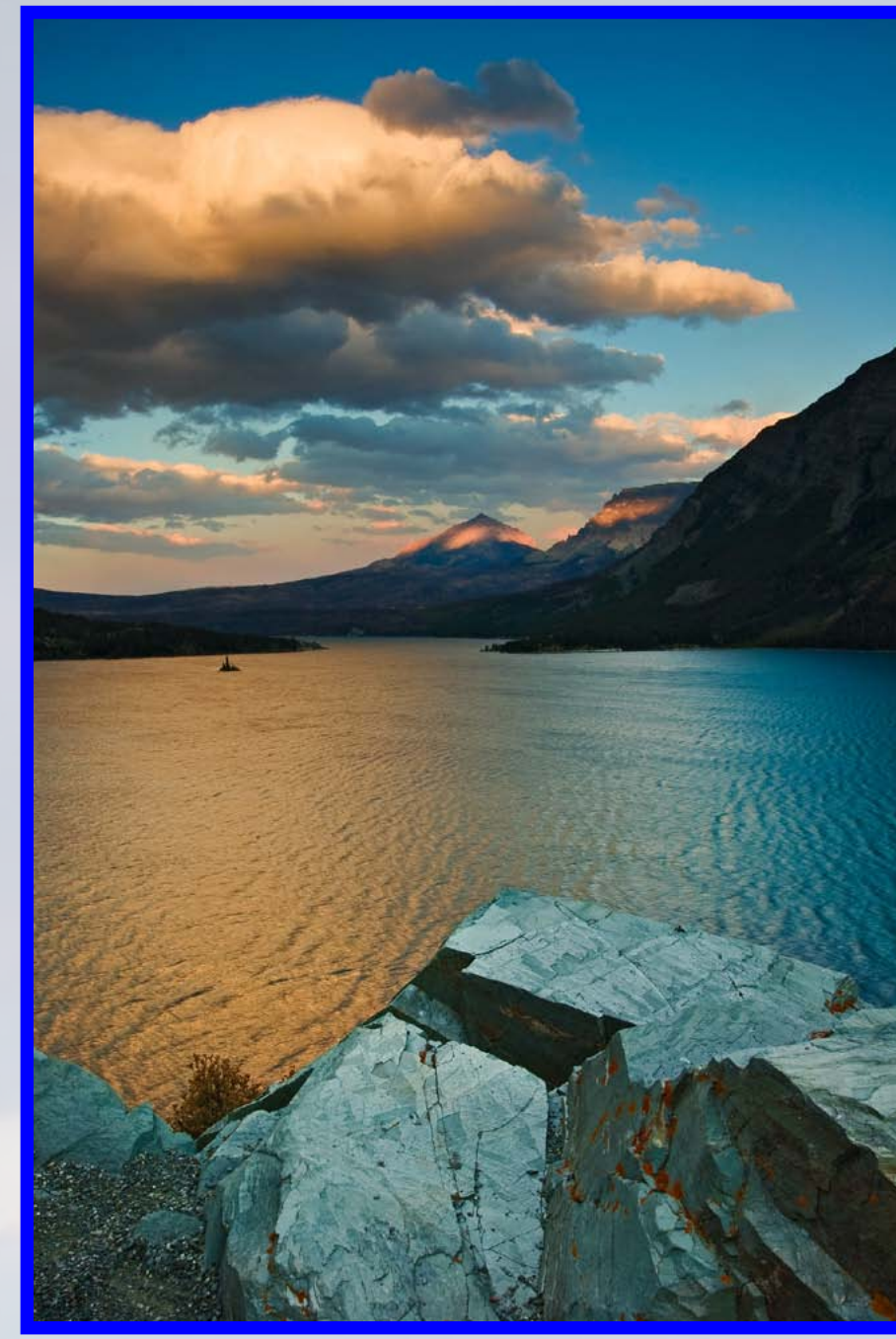


Iceberg Lake
© Jay Patel

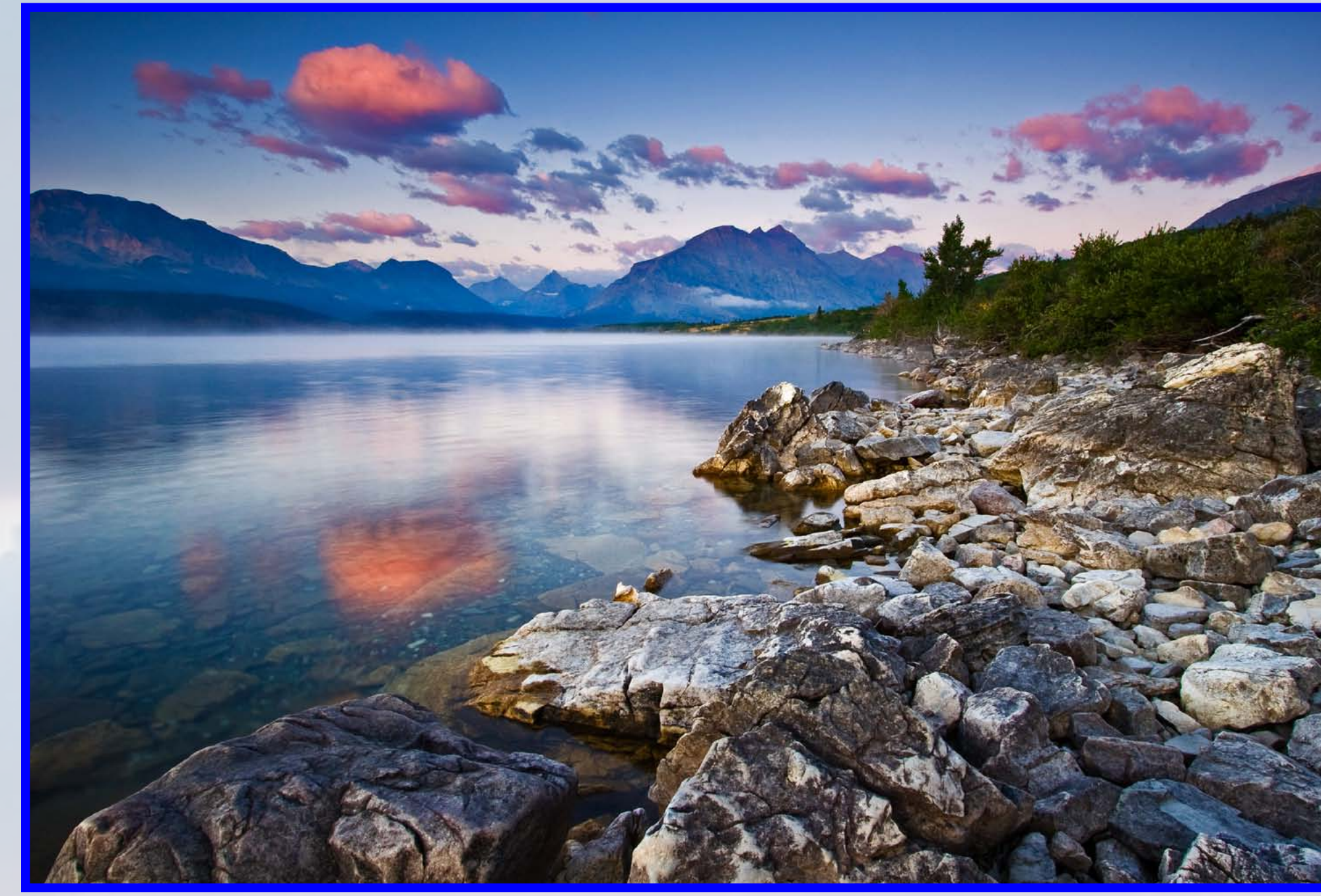
More Thumbnails



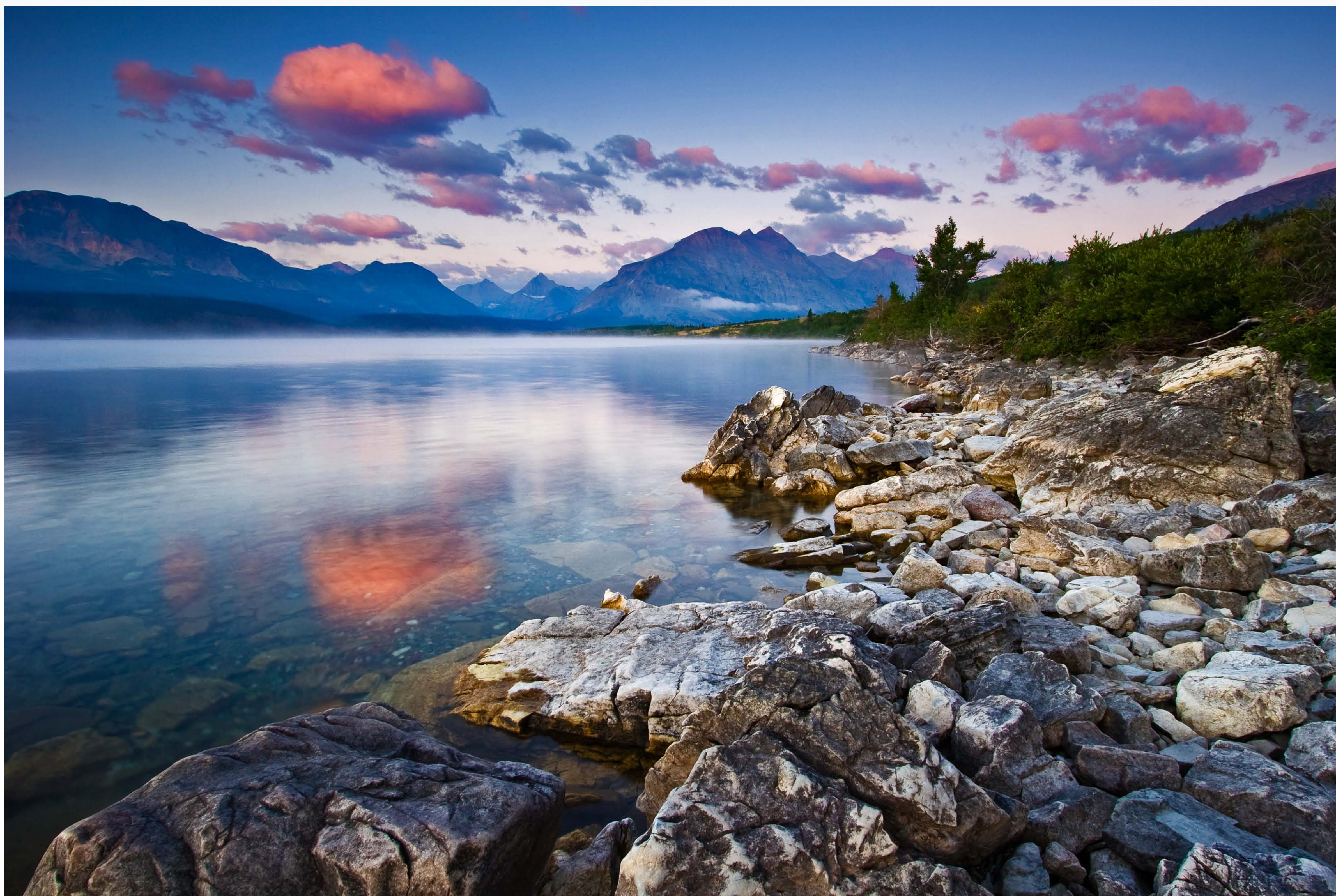
More Thumbnails



Blue and Gold
© Varina Patel



Reflections
© Varina Patel



Jay Patel

Seeds of Jay Patel's appreciation for beautiful places were planted early in his childhood on numerous trips to some of the most breathtaking locations on the Indian subcontinent. His passion for such magnificent places now manifests itself in a continuous search to capture nature's majestic specularity with his camera. Jay's career in photography began in the summer of 2001 when he purchased his first digital SLR. In subsequent years, he spent much time reading photographic magazines and Internet articles and studying the styles of great landscape photographers. He has had no formal education or training in photography.

Contact: pateljx@gmail.com

Website: <http://www.jaypatelphotography.com>

Varina Patel

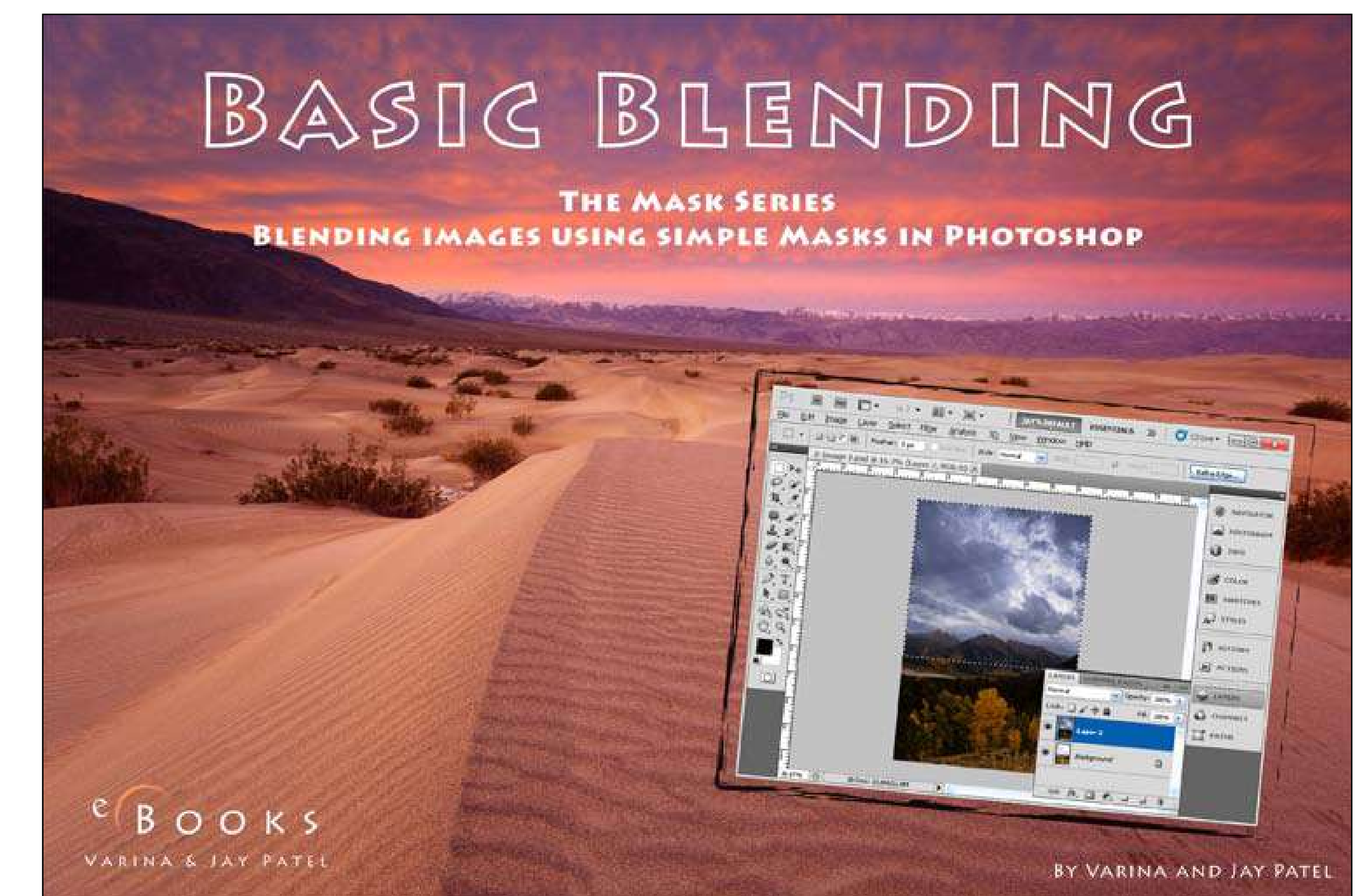
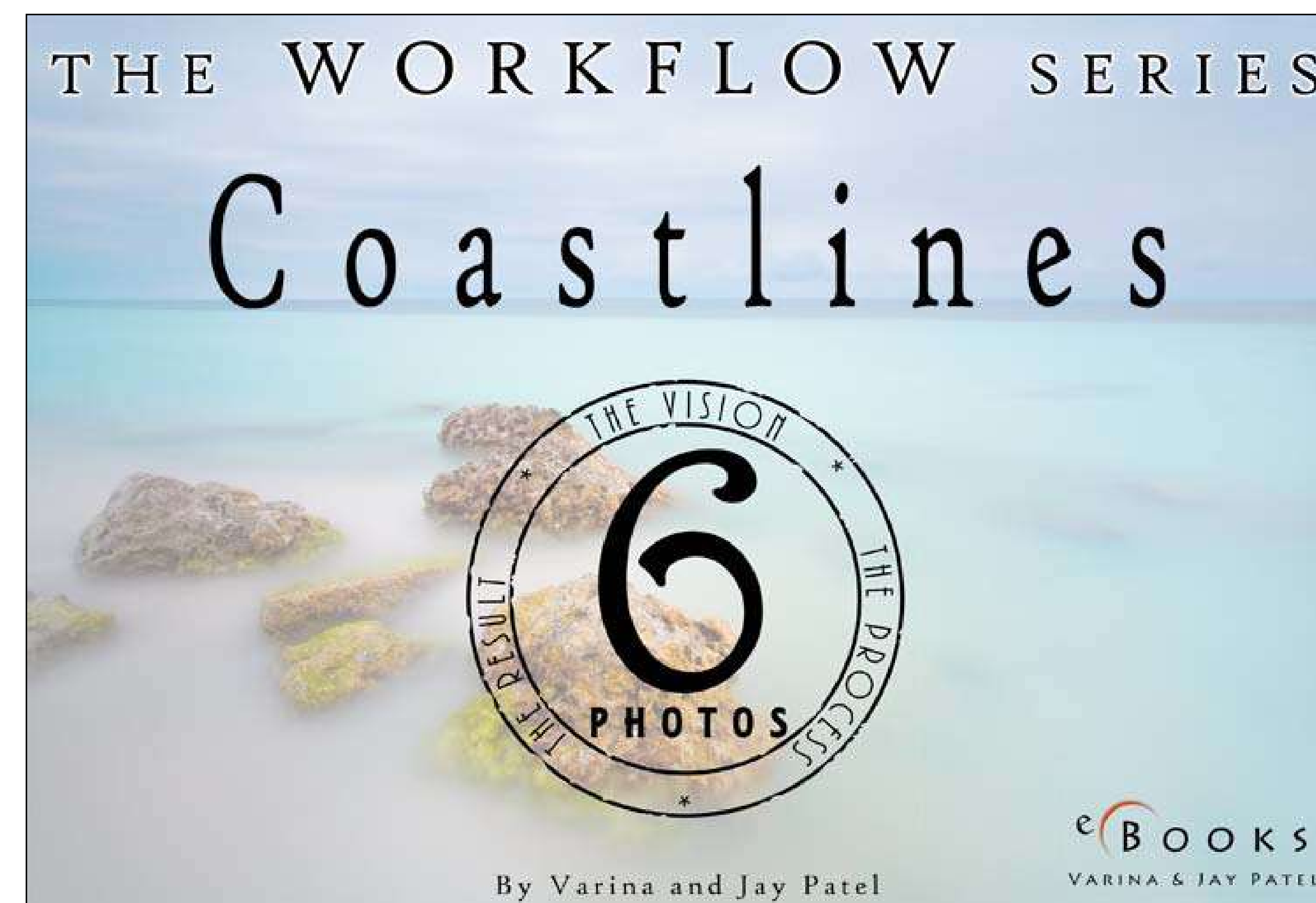
Landscape photography is demanding. It is not unusual to climb a steep trail and wait several hours for sunset – despite intense heat or numbing cold – only to climb back down in the dark without getting the shot because the light wasn't right. Varina is more than willing to return to a location many times if necessary. She doesn't mind cold hands, wet feet, muddy clothes, or aching muscles – if in the end, the photograph makes an impression. She loves hiking long trails through wilderness, crossing rivers on slippery stones, and climbing sand dunes by the light of the moon. Varina thrives on rising before the sun in order to capture those first rays of sun on the mountain, and she is irresistibly drawn to the challenge of finding the right light, in the right place, at the right time.

Contact: varina.patel@gmail.com

Website: <http://www.photographybyvarina.com>

Copyright Information: All material in this course is, unless otherwise stated, the property of Jay and Varina Patel. Copyright and other intellectual property laws protect these materials. Reproduction or retransmission of the materials, in whole or in part, in any manner, without the prior written consent of the copyright holder, is a violation of copyright law.

A single copy of the materials may be made, solely for personal, noncommercial use. Individuals must preserve any copyright or other notices contained in or associated with them. Users may not distribute such copies to others, whether or not in electronic form, whether or not for a charge or other consideration, without prior written consent of the copyright holder of the materials. Contact information for requests for permission to reproduce or distribute materials available is listed at the right.



Are you ready for more? Check out the rest of our eBooks at
www.jaypatelphotography.com
www.photographybyvarina.com

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
VARINA

JAY **PATEL**
PHOTOGRAPHY