

Many People come looking

"There are no days in life so memorable
As those which vibrated to some stroke of the imagination"
Ralph Waldo Emerson

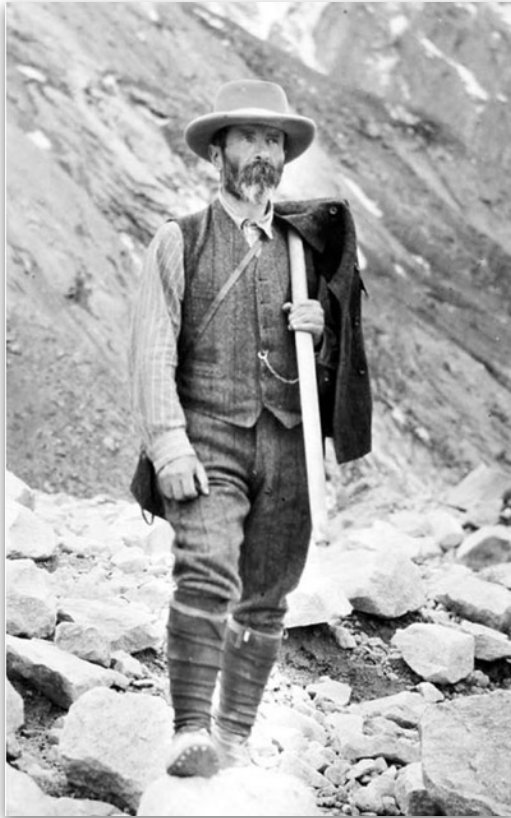


A muddy trail descended steeply along the hillside rice paddy. There was no room for error as porters squeezed by with huge loaded baskets on their way to the central market in Khandbari. My mouth still burned from the previous evening's encounter with a fire-laden pepper hidden in the rice and dhal, yet I felt alive trekking among the giant peaks of the Nepalese Himalaya. Out of the early morning mist, someone was calling my name. As the figure approached, I suddenly recognised Tsering Dorje Sherpa, who was the brilliant cook from my climbing expedition to Nepal in 1983.

I had never tired of his kindness, sense of fun and irreverence - typical characteristics of the Sherpas of Nepal. Within the hour I was at his house quaffing Chang (fermented barley) and Tsering was proudly and animatedly introducing me to his wife and children - all ten of them!

Anyone who travels with adventure at heart and curiosity of mind will know the wonderful feeling of engaging with local people, a different

culture or becoming part of a beautiful landscape albeit for just a short time. In many ways such meetings are so poignant that we may not immediately think of taking photographs, relying instead on our later memories. Yet there is an innate compulsion to record as much of the travel experience as we can without truly knowing why we are doing it. Inevitably I did photograph Tsering and his family and it was one of those times which, 18 years later, reminds me of my passion for travel and how photography became a means of communicating my own experiences. With the advancement in camera technologies and the ease of travel today, there is huge potential to visualise, record and communicate our perception of the world, however small.



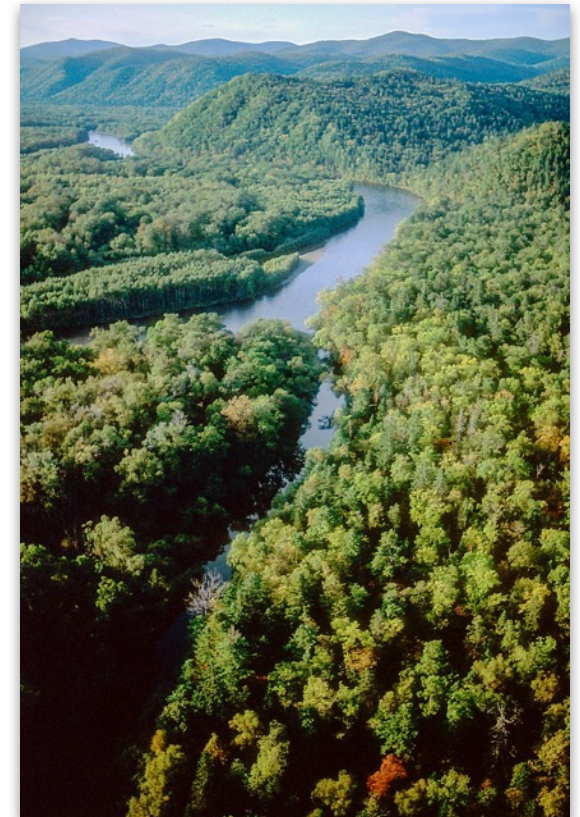
Spare a thought then for some of the early travel and documentary photographers who struggled with heavy weight camera equipment and excruciatingly long exposures, yet returned home to astound packed audiences with their exploits and images. My love of the mountains and mountain culture drew me long ago to the astonishing work of celebrated Italian mountaineer and photographer, Vittorio Sella*. Armed with wooden tripods and huge glass plates, Sella spent months at the turn of the 19th Century travelling through the world's great mountain ranges recording both sublime high-altitude mountain scenery and sensitive studies of remote communities. Many of his black & white images are still used today by scientists & explorers to further our knowledge of these extreme worlds.

Black & white imagery remains immensely popular at both amateur and professional levels, but colour has seduced us and bombarded us to such a degree that it dominates our vision of the world. William Albert Allard* is a travel and documentary photographer best associated with the venerable National Geographic magazine. For nearly 30 years his evocative colour photography has consistently brought artistry and intensity to personal stories defining culture and identity.

Looking at the work of these and other itinerant photographers, who test the boundaries of the photographic medium on their travels, is inspiring and relevant. A travel image has the potential to convey a real sense of place. It also says a great deal about ourselves. On numerous occasions when we travel, we are confronted with the less salubrious

sides of life - environmental damage, people in economic fallout, a clash of cultural sensibilities. Do we side step them? Or do we take a closer look and try to understand their origins, maybe even take the opportunity to help out?

On one such occasion I was travelling in Russia's Far East documenting indigenous peoples and came across the serious issue of uncontrolled logging which threatened the environment, a dwindling population of Siberian Tiger and the traditions of the tribal 'Udege' people. Some of the villagers had resorted to working for the logging company during the week and joining protest rallies at the weekends against the logging! Some of my photographs were used in a campaign by Survival International who were successful in helping to halt the rampant logging operations, enabling both people and wildlife to regain control and perspective in their lives.



However, if we are honest with ourselves, much of our photography when we travel is about celebration - capturing pure exuberance, emotion, colour, and the way light transforms the mundane into the monumental. In future issues of Outdoor Photography we will be looking into how we can make these transformations. We will look at how to immerse oneself in personal stories, distil a favourite travel theme, take on the issues of travel and photography with a conscience, but above all to engender our photography with grace, style and spirit.



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- * *Summit by Vittorio Sella* Published by Aperture
- * *William Albert Allard - The photographic Essay* Published by Bullfinch Press