A photographic odyssey through four seasons in the Second College Grant.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAUL REZENDES

Northern Exposure
"The Grant's charm lies in its fierce ruggedness and isolation. When you go there you know that you will encounter few other humans."

—Nelson Bryant '46
"DARTMOUTH IS THE STEWARD OF THE LAND AND TREES"

OF THE NORTHERN GRANT, AND WE HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO PROTECT THIS SPECIAL PLACE. WE ALL NEED TO KNOW THAT NO MATTER WHAT ELSE MAY BE GOING ON IN OUR LIVES, THE WATER IS STILL RUNNING DOWN THE DEAD DIAMOND RIVER, CLEAR AND CLEAN AND COLD."

—PRESIDENT JAMES WRIGHT
"MY MOST MEMORABLE GRANT EXPERIENCE"
“IT’S A UNIQUE PLACE AND MAKES DARTMOUTH SPECIAL.

IT ALLOWS A CERTAIN NUMBER OF PEOPLE TO EXPERIENCE THAT SOLITUDE AND CAMARADERIE THAT IS PART OF NEW ENGLAND, HIGHLIGHTS FROM MY TRIPS INCLUDE A MOOSE COMING THROUGH THE WINDOW OF MY TRUCK, AND SEEING THE NORTHERN LIGHTS FROM THE HELLGATE PORCH.”

— NORMAN WEBBER ’71
Shooting the Grant

BY BEN YEOMANS

I HAD THE JOB OF ASSISTING Paul Rezendes as he photographed the Grant, season by season, for Dartmouth Alumni Magazine. Helping Paul with his work gave me a more realistic idea of the effort and resources that lie behind all those striking landscapes we see in magazines, books and calendars. Depending on the season, a day in the field could last from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. and we would work those hours five or six days in a row. On foot we would carry 120 pounds of gear and photo equipment for miles to a remote pond or up a mountain in hopes of a good view. Sometimes we found only unfavorable light or perspective, and we returned without a shot taken.

On a typical day we’d load our photo equipment and gear into a van and head down the roads of the Grant. We would scan the landscape, looking at cloud patterns to determine the direction of our morning shoot. Patchy clouds in the east might send us west to shoot into the sun. Clear skies might find the rising sun at our backs as we waited for the Diamond Peaks to light up. From dawn until dark, our route was determined by clouds, wind and changes in the light. Throughout the four seasons we scouted the Grant by foot, snowshoe and van, sometimes rewarded with a perfect shot down a river lined with conifers, other times thwarted by wind or inadequate lighting. We were always looking.

Each season had its own character and offered distinct challenges to our assignment. Summer tested our stamina with long days and short nights. The winter welcomed us with single-digit temperatures, relatively few hours of light and deep snow, which slowed our travel significantly. Many of my spring memories are a haze of black flies and no-see-ums. It seemed no matter how much of our skin we covered, they’d find us. We would wait for a cloud to pass or a momentary break in the wind.

One spring morning, overcast skies almost kept us in bed. But a slight clearing on the eastern horizon beckoned us to a pre-scouted spot on the Swift Diamond River. Pushing through the dew-soaked brush between road and river, we stepped out on the bank to see the glassy water reflecting the dark purple cloud mass above. We shot frame after frame (left) as the light increased and the river and clouds moved through a stunning spectrum of color until the sun at last crested the ridge.

Moments like this, when so many of nature’s elements came together, were rare. Rarer still were the times when we were there, in just the right spot, to capture on film. That spring sunrise was full of magic we were always searching for.

During the winter, many roads were unpaved. So we snowshored our way around with the camera bags and tripod strapped to a plastic sled. One of us would break trail and the other would harness himself to the sled and play husky. Most of one day was spent this way as we headed to Sam’s Lookout, an overlook above the Swift Diamond River. After two hours of hard hiking, we arrived to a fierce wind and a view obscured by trees. We tucked out of the wind, ate a quick lunch and left without taking a picture.

Another day led us up to the Diamond Peaks to photograph the Mahoosuc Range to the south at sunset. Again we hiked in snowshoes, this time with the gear strapped to our backs. Grabbing tree limbs to keep from sliding back down the trail, we trudged through knee-deep snow to a lookout with a clear view. Though the view was stunning, and particularly satisfying after the hike, the light and clouds did not cooperate to give us the photos we were hoping for.

As well as all the technical knowledge of photography that Paul shared with me, he taught me about making choices about a location and then letting go of the need for results. We left the peaks by starlight with no sense of frustration and no second-guessing, just gratitude for our good fortune to be working in such beauty.

BEING YEOMANS is a timber for the seasonal and momentary photographer. He lives in western Massachusetts.

PHOTOGRAPHER PAUL REZENDES MADE SEVEN TRIPS and spent 51 days in the Grant for this photo essay. ‘Shooting there is the kind of assignment I would have designed for myself,’ he says. ‘For me, it was an opportunity to immerse myself into a place and to become one of the people of the place. It had to be experienced to be believed. For me, this work is not just a way to make a living, it is living.’ Rezendes, 58, is an accomplished wilderness photographer. His work has appeared in National Geographic, The New York Times Magazine, and Sierra. He has also published three books and numerous calendars. A professional wildlife consultant and expert animal tracker with nearly 30 years of experience in the field, Rezendes teaches outdoor workshops year-round throughout New England. He lives in Southbridge, Massachusetts.

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