



# Acadia – *A Portrait*

*A look back at my 1982 project*

*James Craig*



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Self published  
[jamescraigphotography.com](http://jamescraigphotography.com)

Created in Apple Aperture

ISBN 978-0-9854538-1-7



In memory of Glenn Van Nimwegen

## The Project

In 1982, inspired by the fact that I had won a few minor photography prizes, sold some of my work, did not enjoy cruising around looking for that disconnected great shot, and an article I read about a photographer who had pre-sold a series of images to promote and help finance a major excursion to Alaska, I determined to give the concept a try and scheduled a month's leave from work to see what I could do in Acadia National Park in Maine.

After going to the local Community College gallery with my project proposal and lining up an opening exhibit date for the end of October – almost a year away, I printed up a little brochure to hand out and mail to previous customers, friends and even relatives. I was asking people to pre-pay for as yet un-conceived images that I would be months in producing and unveiling. This would help finance the project and get my work out there, but perhaps more importantly assure a successful opening – everyone would be there to select their images. I set the price at a little discount from the regular price on my framed images. Years later this system would add extra dimensions to my Easter Island project, providing an opportunity to blog my progress for those involved in – or just following the adventure. And again, it makes for a successful opening reception.

I'll admit to being surprised at the response, especially since marketing is not my strong point. I quickly made my goal of forty pledges, designed to match my target of forty images. In fact, doubles were the rule instead of the exception. This left me free to worry about logistics: a leave from work, the better part of a month away from home, arranging for our girls to stay with family so my wife could share the experience, acquiring an old camper to stay in, equipment, letting my beard grow so I wouldn't have to shave, all of the arrangements which would later serve as a test run for our year on Easter Island.

Nan, and I were pretty thorough in our preparations – and mentally prepared for the inevitable snafus, like having to coast downhill into Bucksport, Maine with a blown universal joint from pulling the camper-trailer and a hole in the gas tank.

Looking back I'm struck by how much has changed. In 1982 I had to shoot roll after roll of film, knowing that I had a lot of time and steps ahead before I would have the slightest idea what I actually had. I shot an average of two to three rolls of PXP 120, fifteen exposures each, per day, wrapping them up carefully, labeling them and storing everything until I returned home. Today it would seem nerve-wracking, then it was the norm.

This meant the first couple of weeks back home were devoted to developing negatives. Because my darkroom was in the basement, I processed negatives in one of the upstairs bathrooms. No windows and easily rendered pitch dark – and closer to family. This meant carefully loading the film onto stainless steel spools, in the dark, and processing them through the developer, stop, fix and clearing agent baths. After hang drying, I cut them into four-exposure strips. This had to be done for about sixty rolls of 120 film and half a dozen 35mm.

I didn't get to really sit down and take stock until I printed the contact sheets. Voila – a loose leaf notebook of thumbnail size images to review with an 8X loupe. What came next is why I didn't schedule the opening exhibit until late Fall. Even then I would have less than sixteen weeks in which to produce forty images, mount, mat and frame them – while working full time. Ouch – a new final exhibit image every two and a half to three days.

Darkroom printing is a process of trial and error, and the amount of chemicals and paper I went through was astounding. Test prints, washing and drying, hanging them up so I could sit and contemplate while drinking whole pots of coffee, trying again. Occasionally I would get one in a day, most more. And then there were those I changed my mind on and went back to start over. My most complex image was *Surf, Rocks, Monument Cove*. When I finally got what I wanted the page and a half of darkroom notes dictated fourteen separate exposures, varying everything from dodges and burns to contrast filters. These notes would help a lot when it was time duplicate the images on the computer.

## Acadia National Park in 1982

Acadia National Park in 1982 hadn't yet been outed by National Geographic as a "best kept secret." Entry was free and even in late June the two of us felt like we practically had the place to ourselves. There were what we considered then plenty of visitors, but other than an occasional car on the loop road – which we covered daily, a small crowd on top of Cadillac Mountain for the sunsets, and bustling traffic in Bar Harbor, we could go hours without seeing a soul.

Today it's hard to imagine the isolation of just a few years ago. No cell phones, no coffee shop wifi. Going into town and finding a pay-phone was our only connection to our home world. At one point I accidentally dropped my only cable release over a cliff – it came loose and fell off the camera. We had to take half a day off and drive to Ellsworth to replace it – lesson about taking along extras of everything learned.

Usually we were up at or before dawn. Lighting was pretty good up to about ten in the morning and after four in the afternoon. On days without a major trail hike, we could go into town for a relaxed lunch. Otherwise we ate a packed meal, often stretching out on a smooth boulder somewhere for a mid-day rest. Toting a heavy medium format camera on a sturdy tripod and a backpack loaded with a 35mm SLR and 300mm lens could get a little tiring.

We would return in 1984 with our three daughters for a family hiking tour of the park. Traffic still hadn't picked up much, nothing like the long lines of cars we experienced just a few years later.

## Evolution of the Portfolio

The Acadia portfolio today still numbers forty images, retaining all but eight of the original selections. Replacement images are noted in the short anecdotes accompanying the images. A couple were held back because they wouldn't hold up to the specified printing size for the project, others were additions to a sequence, while a few lay undiscovered for years awaiting the lead-up to my final farewell to film, a negative scanning marathon.

There have been other changes. I've moved from darkroom printing to digital, still doing all my own printing, only now with archival *ultrachrome* inks. I can fine tune my results more than I ever imagined in the depths of my chemical permeated darkroom. And I finally tired of the limitations set by the old universal of 20 by 24 inch framing, adopting a visually more pleasing standard of 15 or 16 by 20 inch images matted and framed 22 by 26.

And I'm not restricted by my initial offer of all the images being the same size – I offer larger and smaller versions of most of the images, and limit the sizes on others.

## The Images

## First Light, Monument Cove

*Monument Cove can be easy to overlooked if you are just making a few casual stops along the Loop Road. But the somewhat tricky trip down is well worth repeated trips, at different times of the day. This is from above just as the sun was coming up.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PxP 120 • F22





## Surf, Rocks, Monument Cove

*The constantly clattering, smooth rocks in Monument Cove. Gray when dry, they take on a reflective black sheen when wet. If I went today I would be sure to make a recording.*



## Morning Fog, Otter Cliffs

*We passed this scene a number of times, right on the Loop Road, before I finally set the tripod up in the middle of the road to get the shot. Morning fog would completely block the view of the ocean through the trees.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PxP 120 • F22

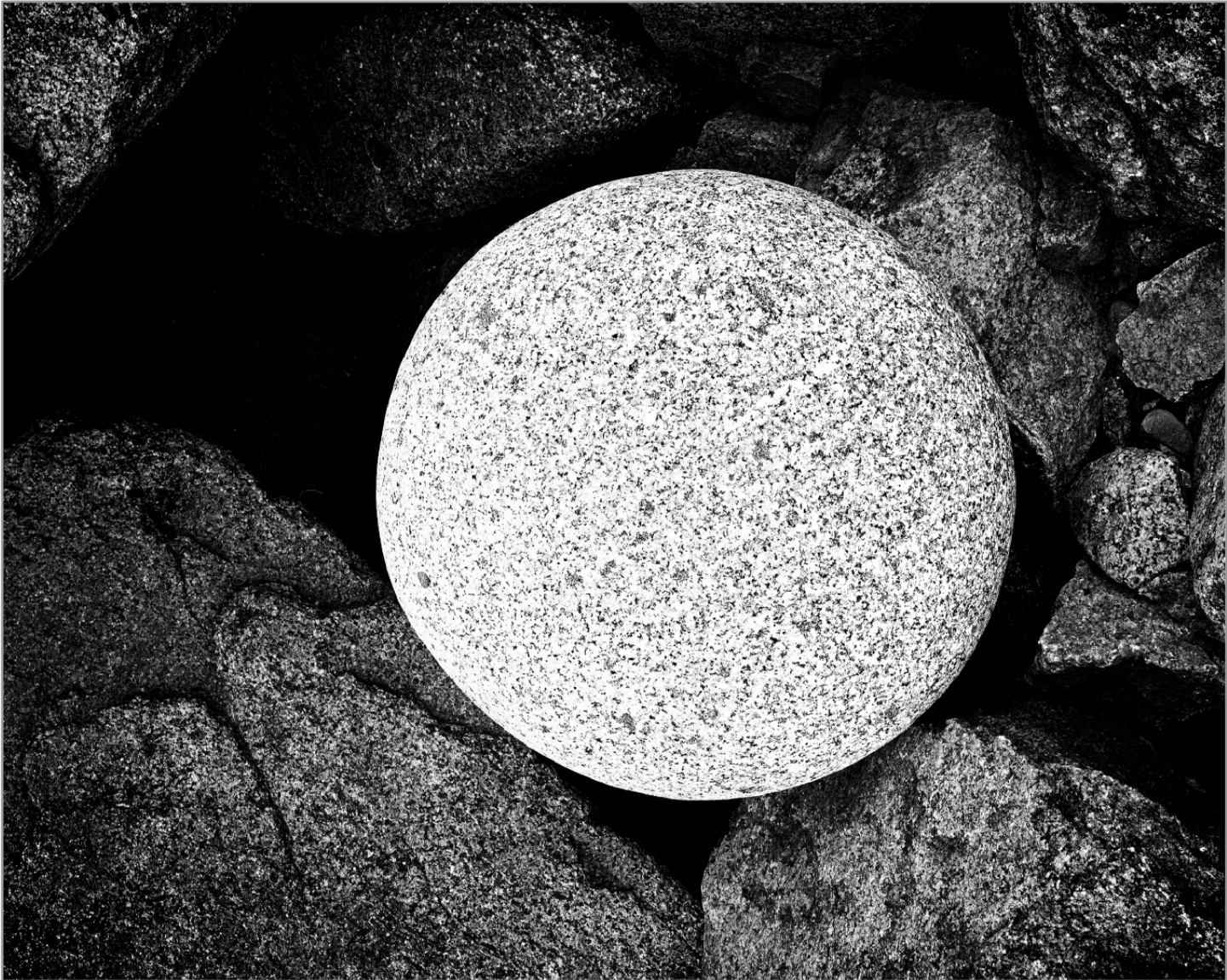




## Trapped Boulder Worn Smooth By Tide and Rocks

*There was a good reason that this was not in the original exhibit, even though photographed using medium format there's something about the texture of the granite in the bolder that didn't fare well enlarged to the size the project demanded. I rediscovered the image in 2013 and print it a little smaller.*

*Monument Cove is home to thousands of time-worn, roundish rocks and boulders worn smooth by tide and other rocks. The symphony of clatter as waves roll in and out is something to experience. This one was trapped, eternally tossed and worn on all sides as it bounced and rolled – it had become a perfect sphere. If my memory serves me right, it was a little over a foot in diameter, hopefully large and heavy enough to deter anyone from taking it.*





## Pine Tree in Fog, Otter Point

*I loved this tree and couldn't understand how it managed to survive so close to the water. Two years later, when we took the three girls back with us, all that remained was a dead main trunk.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PxP 120 • F22



## Eagle Lake

*One of the things I like about doing larger prints is the ability to pick up on something tiny but interesting way in the distance. In this case, on the far right, just in front of the mountains across the lake, there are two fishermen in a small rowboat.*



## Rain Pool, Cotton Grasses, Cadillac Mountain

*The careful composition of this shot belies the havoc that was the scene behind the camera. A black fly, the scourge of usually more inland areas there in June, was determined to have me for dinner. In desperation I told Nan that I didn't care if she had to beat me half to death with her umbrella, just keep him away from me long enough to set up and get my shot.*



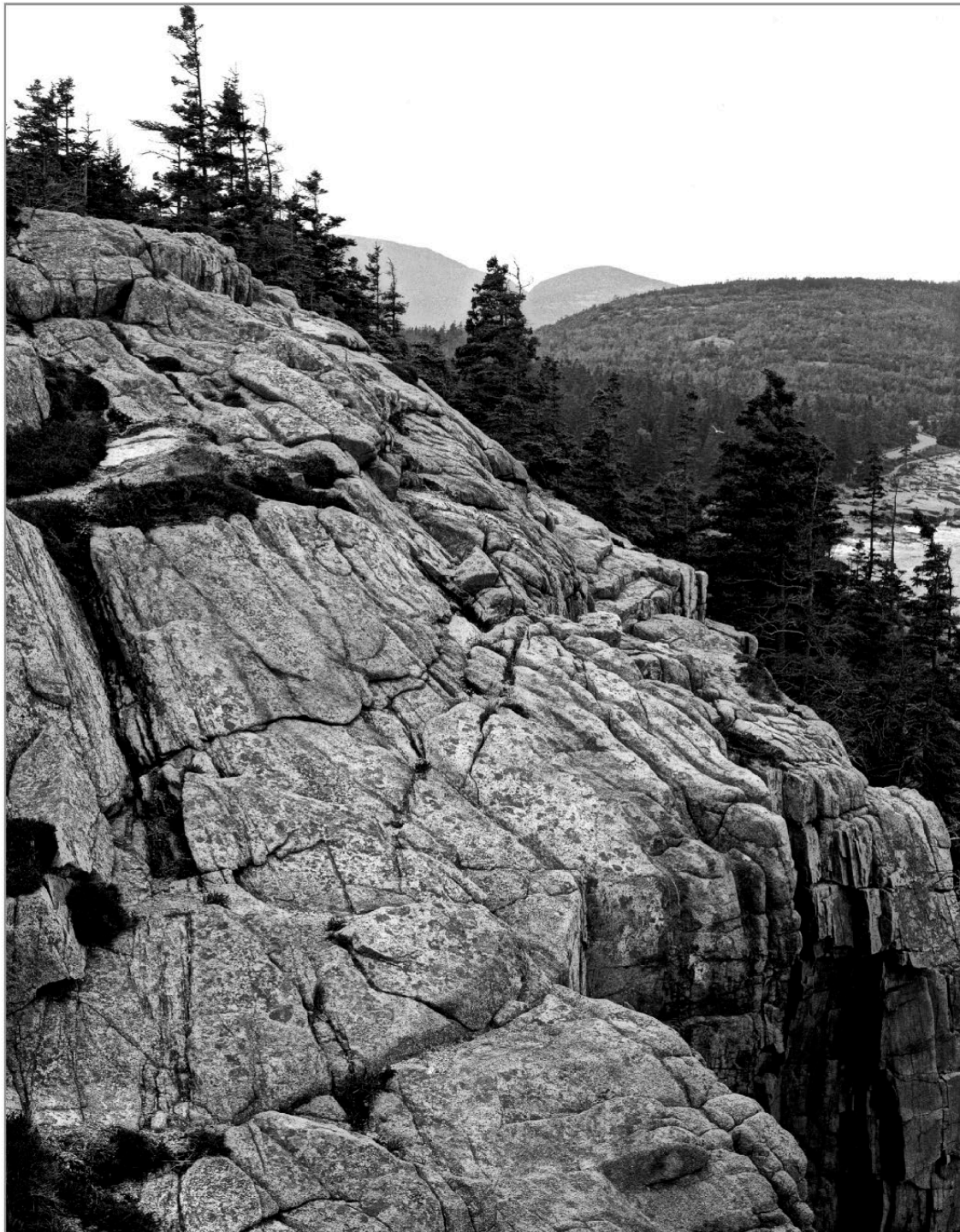




## Otter Cliffs

*I originally shot two of these, one with the gull approaching around the cliff, large and obvious. I prefer this one, with him zooming away in the distance, almost indiscernible.*





## Sunset from Cadillac Mountain

*We hiked up to the top of Cadillac Mountain only once, hitching a ride back. The rest of the time, mostly for the sunsets, we took the steep road up. The trip back down always left our brakes smoking a little.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PxP 120 • F22



## Birch, Cliff, Cadillac Mountain

*On a little creek near where you turn onto the road up Cadillac Mountain. I admired the tenacity of this tree reaching this size growing out of wet, moss covered rocks on the cliff side.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PxP 120 • F22

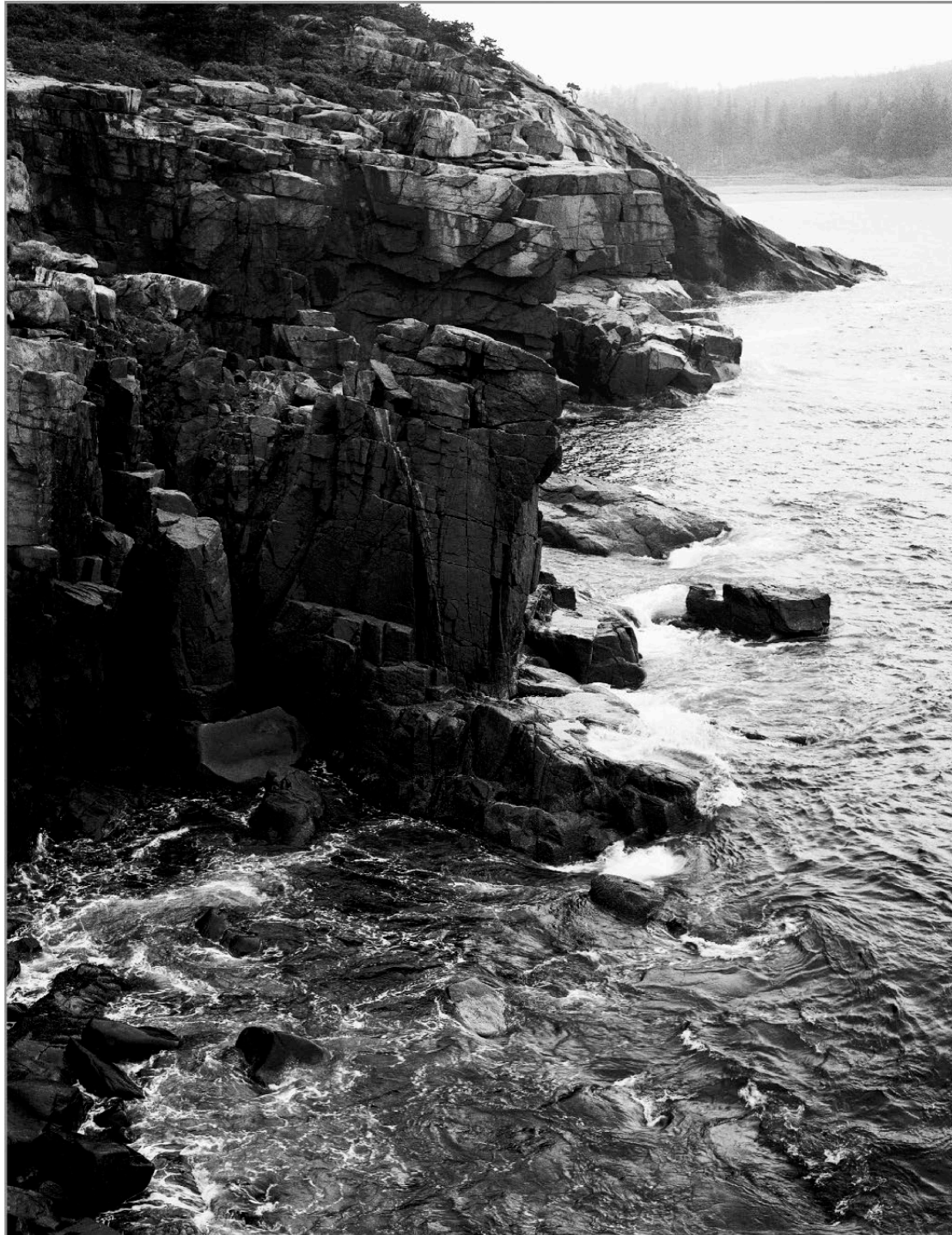




## Cliffs, Surf, Newport Cove

*It was a particularly dingy, drizzly day, perfect for this scene. As I was setting up for my first shot – actually from the middle of this view – we spied another photographer standing over his tripod and aiming in our direction. Since he was there first, we vacated and directed our path to where he stood.*

*This is how we met Glenn Van Nimwegen, peripatetic freelance nature photographer. He lived much of the year out of his pickup mounted camper and travelled the country covering national and state parks. We got to know him a little and explained what we were up to. Even then we were completely floored when, months later, he appeared at my opening reception. Sadly he succumbed to cancer a few years later.*





## Lobster Boat, Bar Harbor

*Most of the newer lobster boats were in much better shape and had large radio receiving dishes on them. This one, badly in need of paint and looking like a throwback to bygone days, didn't even have a readable name on it.*

Canon F1 w/ 300mm • TX @ ISO 800 • F8



## Schooner Head

*One of our favorite things to do in Maine is to park ourselves on a smooth rock and watch the surf.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PxP 120 • F22



## Crescent Moon over Dorr Mountain

*On the way back to the campsite one evening I spotted this view from the road. To hold the camera steady, I climbed into the back seat, rolled the window partway up and jammed the lens into the corner. It wasn't a Canon lens and, sharp at F8, it wasn't all that usable at wide open. So my shutter speed was*

Canon F1 w/ 300 mm • TX @ 800 • F8



## Tree Stump, Hunter's Cove

*Like a lot of people, I see faces in trees, knots and stumps. For a time I tried capturing that, with little success. Then I spotted this one. At the right angle, in the right light the old fellow came to life. You get the feeling that if he could talk, he would have some stories to tell.*







## Gorham Mountain, Reflection

*I like this image, but only printed a full 18x24. That way the lily pads become individualized and create a flowing pattern in the water.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PxP 120 • F22



## Rock Vein, Low Tide Cave

*Totally under water at high tide. I noticed a cave-like entrance and climbed down about twenty feet of cliff to see how far it went in. It was like looking at a cave painting, only created by nature. I worked fast both because as the rocks dried they got lighter and I was a little unsure how fast the tide would come back in. The real challenge would be finding it again.*



## Silver Birch, Fern, Schoodic Point

*On our one trip out to Schoodic Point, the sea was just too fogged in. Oddly, the wooded areas were clear. I wound up with this texture shot and a view deeper into the woods.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PxP 120 • F22

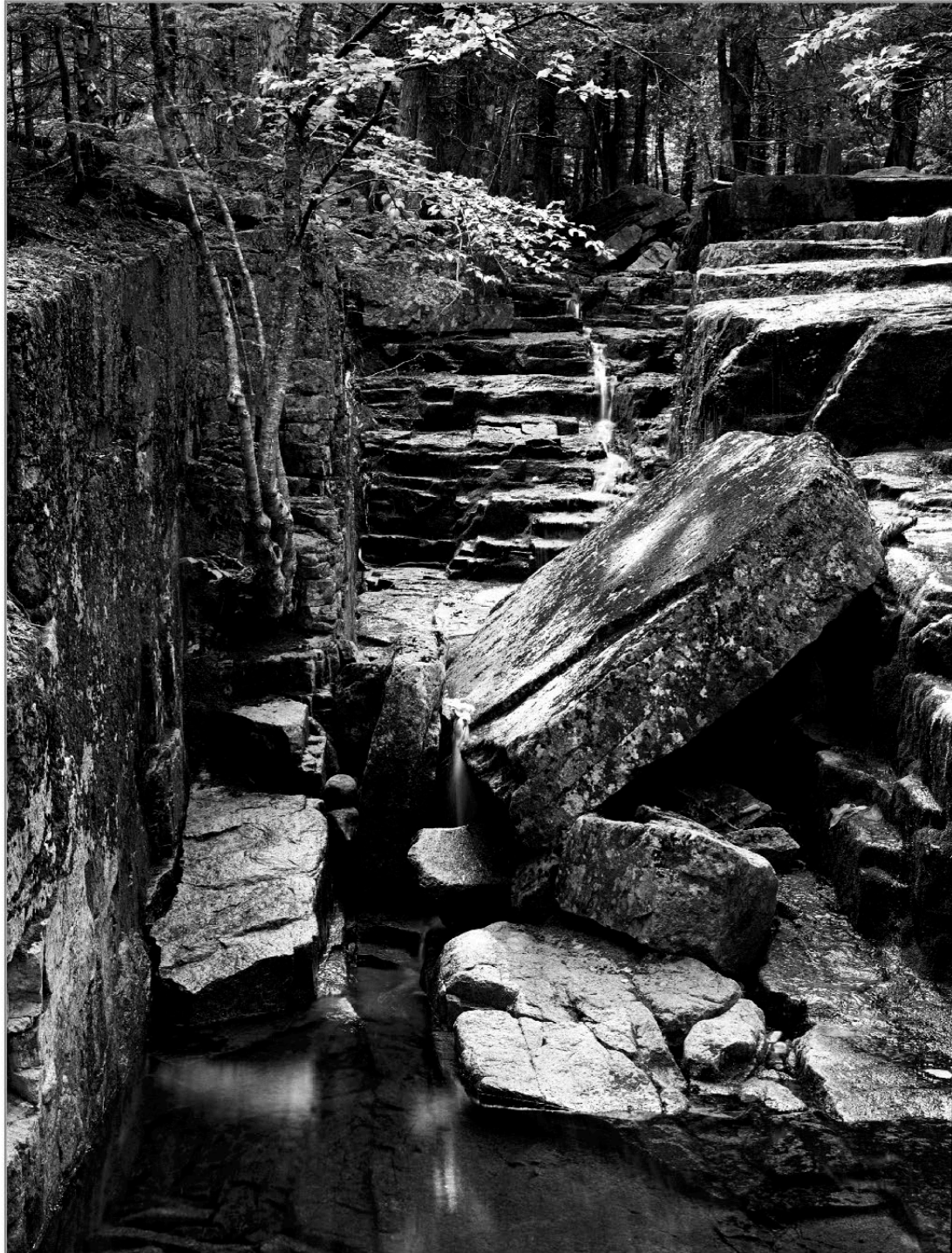




## Reflection, Giant Slide Trail

*I know from similar sites at home that scenes like this vary greatly from day to day according to the amount of rain. Always worth a quick check.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PxP 120 • F22



## Porcupines

*I shot this of the Porcupines rising out of the fog from the road overlooking Bar Harbor.*

Canon F1 w/ 300mm • TX @ ISO 800 • F8



## Still Moment, Jordon Pond

*This negative sat undiscovered in my files from 1982 until 2013 when I was doing my negative scanning marathon and came up with a number of "new" images.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PXP 120 • F22



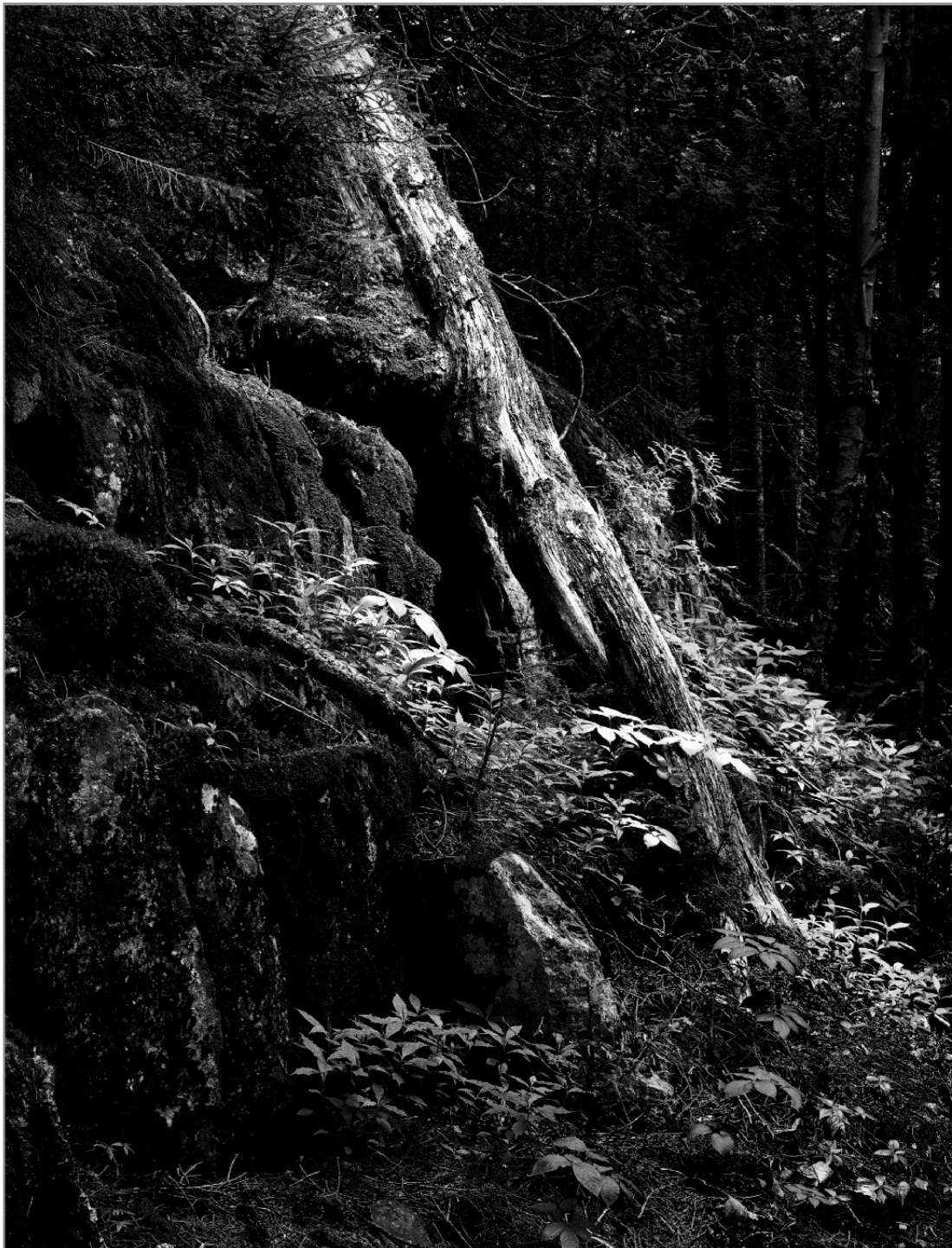




## Deep Woods Scene, Schoodic Point

*What better way to show the presence of patches of deep, dark woods than to highlight the scene with bursts of sunlight.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PxP 120 • F22



## The Beehive

*Frenchman's Bay with the mound called the Beehive.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PXP 120 • F22



## Mountain Flowers, Root, Gorham Mountain Trail

*One of my personal favorites, mainly for the composition.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PxP 120 • F22





## Rocks, Morning Light, Sand Beach

*We would often begin our day at Sand Beach for sunrise. Besides, it was a great opportunity to find cool driftwood, sand dollars, anything that might have washed up with the night's tide.*



## Old Man's Beard Moss

*One oddity that always strikes me is that tree mosses can be found along the coast in the south and north, but are extremely rare in between.*



## Swirling Surf, Western Point

*Capturing the feel of looking straight down on the surf beating against the rocky shore.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PxP 120 • F22



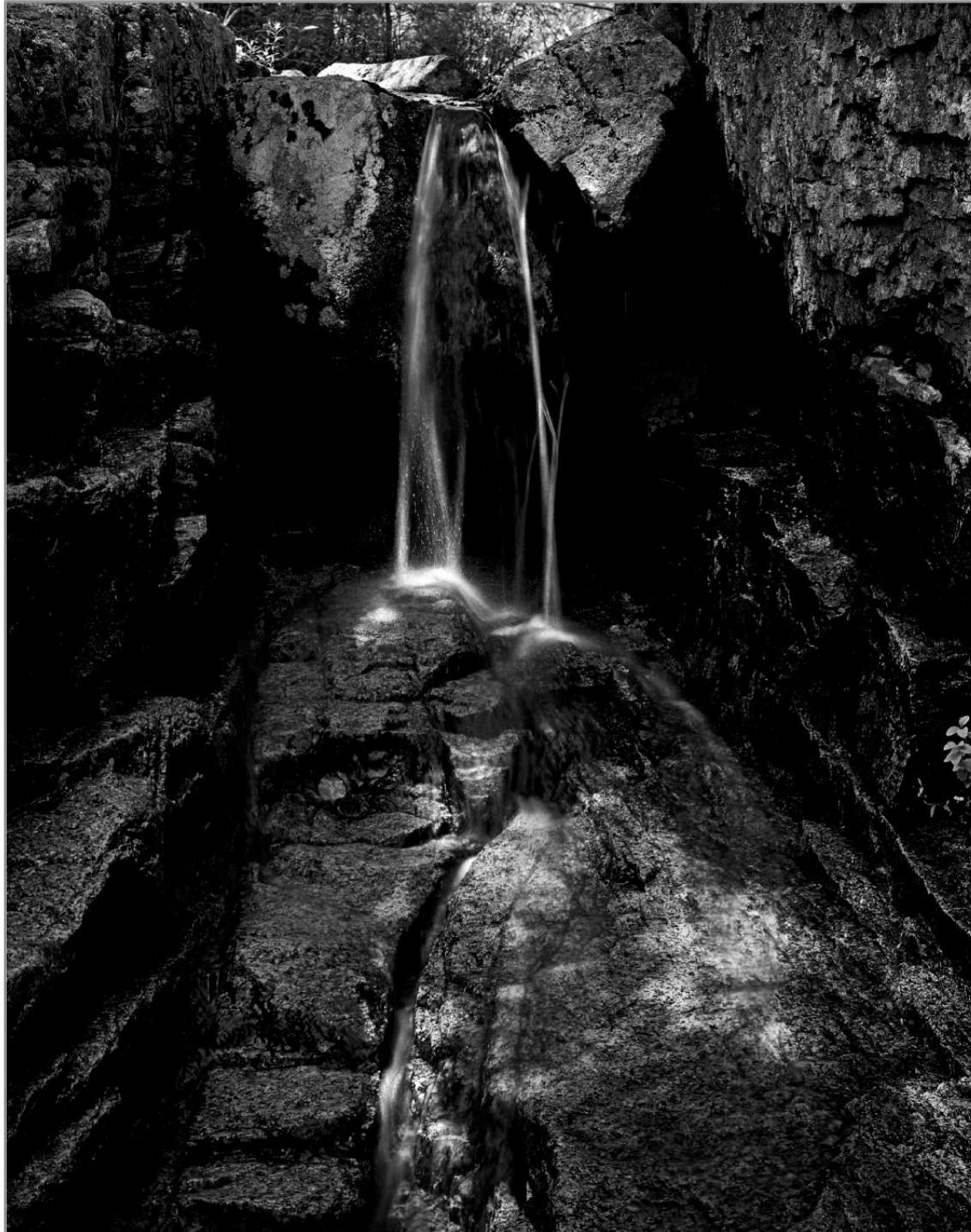


Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PxP 120 • F22 @ 1/15"



## Canon Brook

*We followed the Canon Brook trail to the top of Cadillac Mountain. Not a big creek, but a very pleasant, if long hike up.*



## Jordon Pond, Bubbles

*I can't count the number of times we made this stop, a short hike in from the road, trying to catch a lull in the breeze. I would set up and wait for the morning shift in the wind. This time the pause lasted about fifteen seconds.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PxP 120 • F22



## Reflection, Swamp Edge

*Another one of my 2013 discoveries. Although, in retrospect, it is such a bear to print that I'm not sure I would have tackled it in the darkroom.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PxP 120 • F22

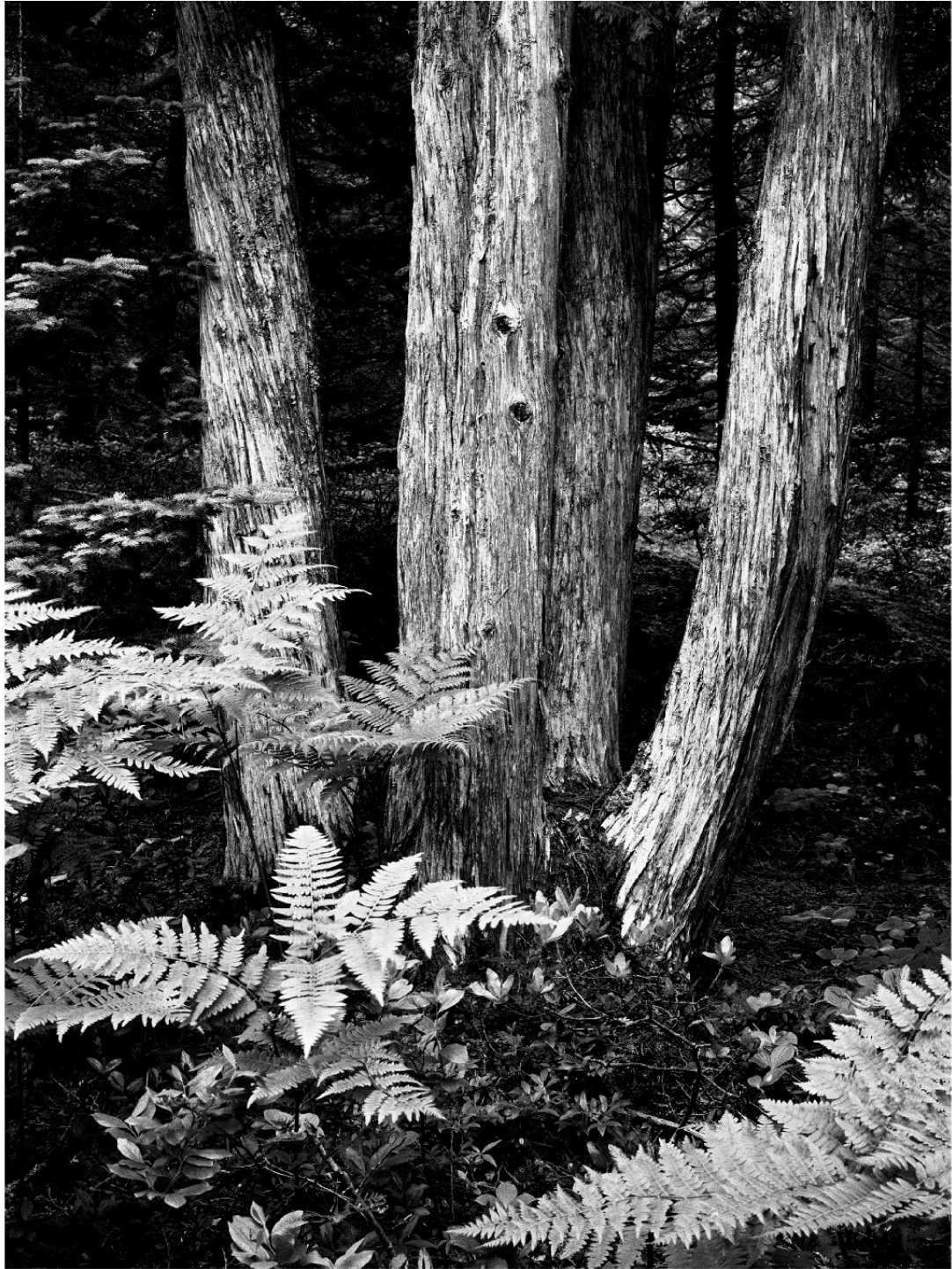




## Trees, Fern

*A touch of reality, I went off into the woods to relieve myself and liked the scene so much that I went back for the camera.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PxP 120 • F22



## Jordon Pond, North Bubble from Penobscot Mountain

*My main concern with this shot, not easily discernible at this size, was composing it so the tiny little foot-bridge showed in the left hand corner of Jordon Pond. I love watching the patterns cast by shifting clouds, waiting for just the right areas to be lit and shaded.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PxP 120 • F22



## Moss, Pines, Lichens on Rock

*Here I just liked the pattern of light moss, vertical pines and circles of lichen.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PxP 120 • F22



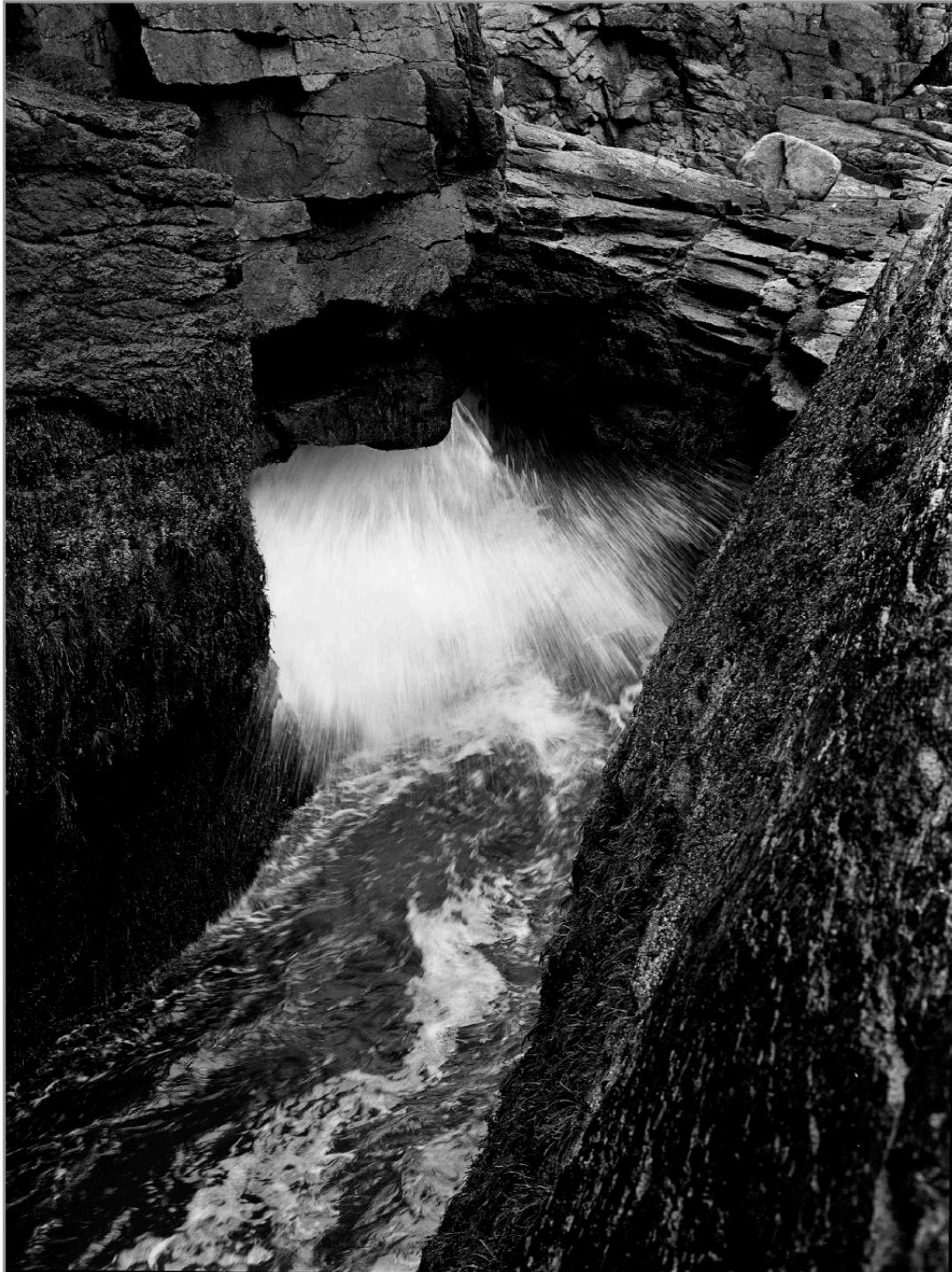




## Thunder Hole

*Thunder Hole goes boom, my attempt to capture a sound with B&W film.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PXP 120 • F16



## Weathered Rock, Pine Growth, Otter Point

*Along the Maine coast, even jumbles of rock, sand, roots and pine growth can take on a barren beauty.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PxP 120 • F22



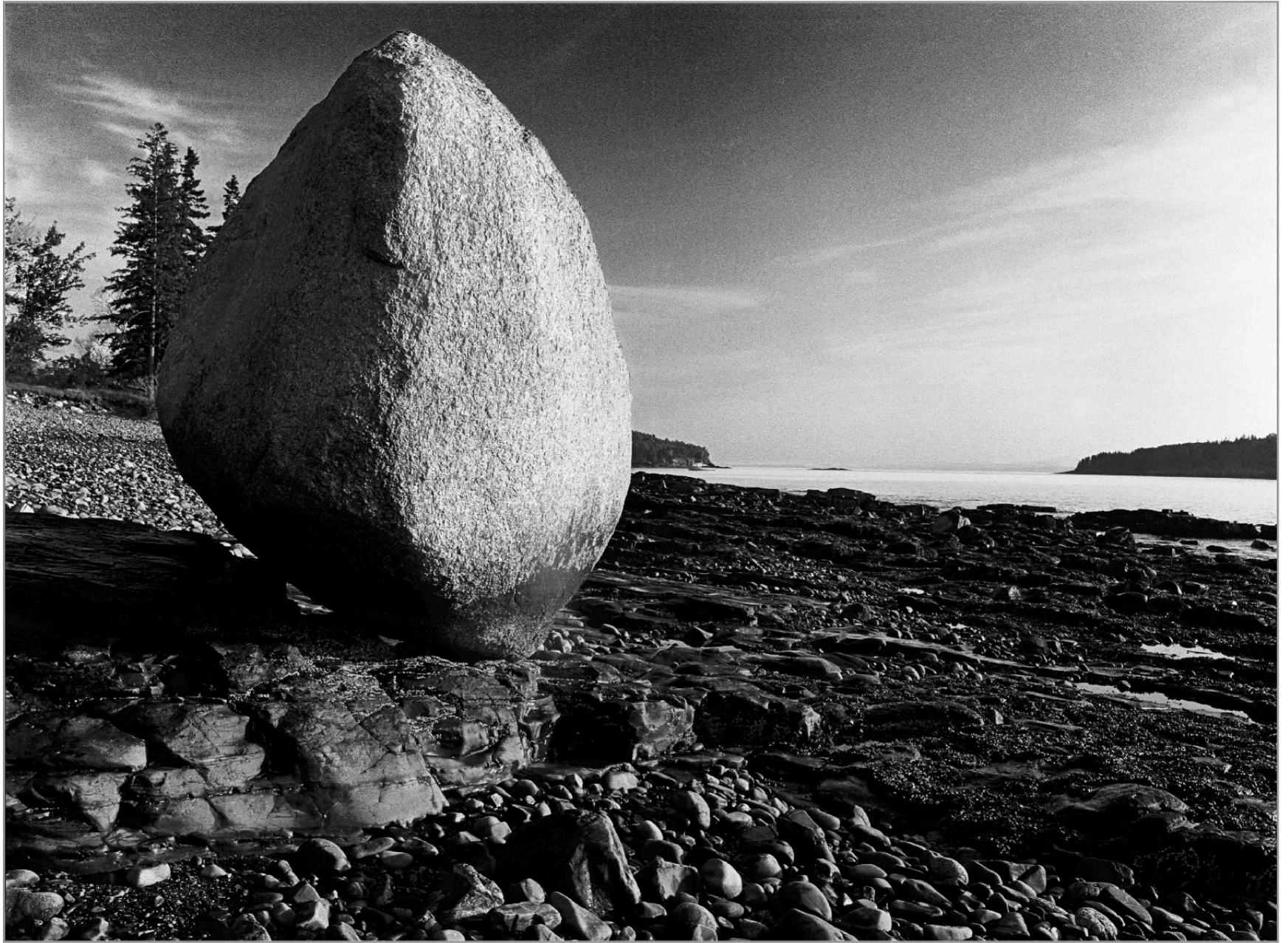




## Balance Rock

*Another work that didn't make the cut for the original exhibit because it wouldn't hold up to being printed that large. Balance Rock is just down the beach a ways from Bar Harbor.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PxP 120 • F22





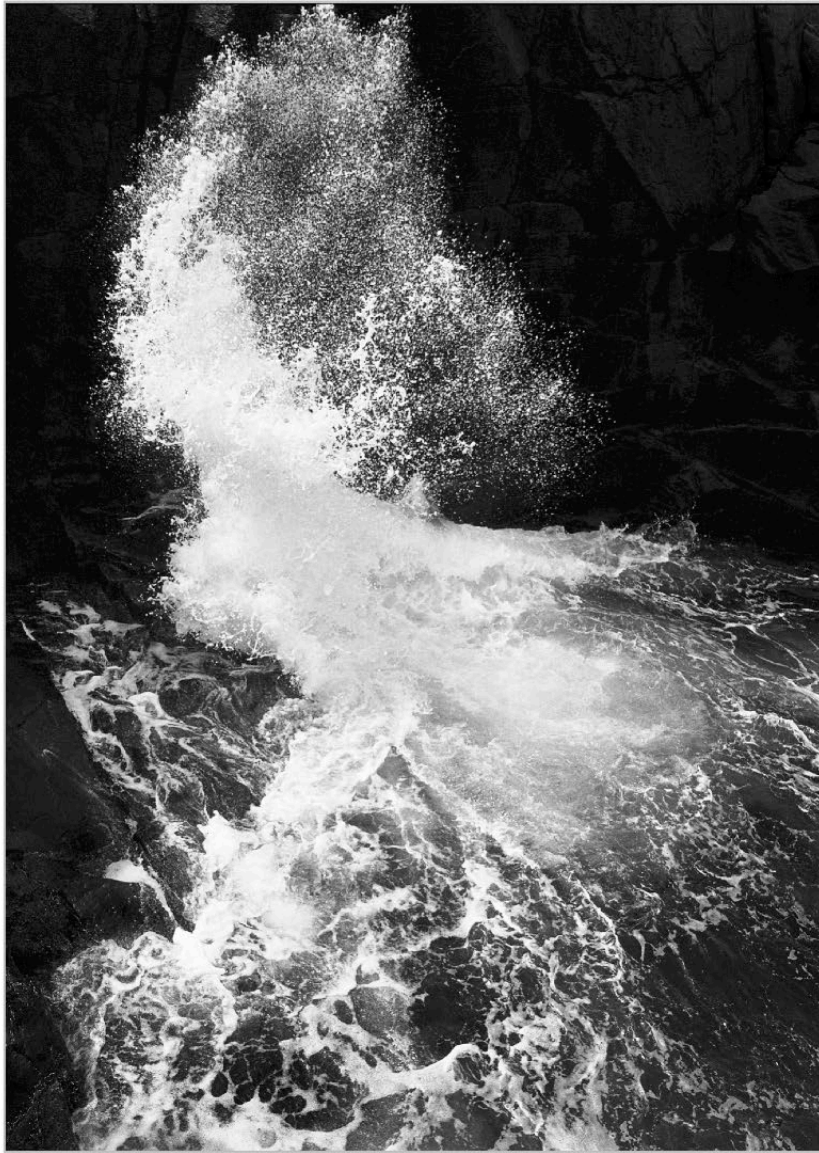
## Waves # 3, 6 and 7

*I made my way onto a boulder separated from a shaded cliff by a small channel that was experiencing large waves. Keeping a sharp eye on the tide so I wouldn't get stranded, I shot a series of sunlit waves at their apex.*

*Only one was used in the original exhibit, printed horizontally. Subsequently, invited to participate in a multimedia showing with the theme "Six Foot Art" –I printed six one-foot square wave images from this series. Later I would trim the sequence down to a triptych and print them as verticals.*



Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PxP 120 • F16



## Sunset #3 from Cadillac Mountain

*Another of the sunsets from Cadillac Mountain. There was often a crowd gathered.*

Mamiya 645 w/ 80 mm • PxP 120 • F22



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*Back cover:* Nan catches me contemplating a potential scene from my carefully chosen perch.

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