

Road Trip Across the Southwest

Caravan through some of America's most scenic parks and landscapes with Tamron Pro Photographer, Ken Hubbard



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Ken Hubbard *is the Field Services Manager for Tamron USA. He is responsible for the company's events, including Tamron's popular consumer workshop series. A talented photographer himself, Ken has had nationwide gallery showings of his portrait and landscape photography and teaches enthusiasts how to take better photos at numerous events. Ken's extensive background in the field of photography is unique and diverse. He has traveled extensively throughout the United States and the result is a consistent output of breathtaking photographs that continually challenge the boundaries of the genre.*

*To view Ken's work, visit:
www.hubbardphotography.net.*

Ken Hubbard test-drives the new Tamron SP 15-30mm F/2.8 Di VC USD lens on a caravan through some of America's most scenic parks and landscapes.

For most of 2014, Ken Hubbard was the "Man in the Van." As part of the highly successful nine-month Tamron Tailgate Tour, Hubbard and the rest of the Tailgate team journeyed across the U.S., making more than 100 stops at participating dealer locations to conduct educational photographic mini-sessions and seminars, demonstrate Tamron lenses, and, of course, take lots of pictures.

"This tour exceeded our expectations by far," Hubbard says. "It was designed to offer hands-on support to our dealers, as well as to educate consumers. It was more a grassroots campaign than a flashy one, but once it gained momentum, it really took off. We're already excited for 2015's tour, which starts up again in April."

Hubbard and fellow Tailgate photographer and instructor André Costantini had traveled to California to shoot a video for the new Tamron SP 15-30mm F/2.8 Di VC USD lens and pick up the van. They embarked on a road trip across the Southwest, traversing through mountains, canyons, and over some of the toughest but most breathtaking terrain in America—and got to test-drive the new 15-30 in the process.

The world's first fast full-frame ultra-wide-angle zoom lens to feature image stabilization, the 15-30 is a state-of-the-art lens employing an innovative XGM eXpanded Glass Molded Aspherical lens element, Tamron's proprietary Vibration Compensation (VC) feature, and the ability to capture both semi-wide and ultra-wide-angle focal lengths. At its ultra-wide settings, the lens is able to take in landscape scenes that can't even be fully absorbed by the human eye.

"This is the wide-angle lens any serious photographer wants in his or her kit," Hubbard says. "It's unbelievably sharp, the only one in its class to have built-in image stabilization with its VC feature, and it's protected by a new fluorine coating that repels moisture and dust, which was perfect for all the conditions we encountered while traveling through the Southwest."

Ride along with Ken on his road trip with the 15-30 lens, which took him and André from the tufa towers of Mono Lake to a rare cloud inversion in the Grand Canyon—and everywhere in between.

*"This is the wide-angle lens
any serious photographer
wants in his or her kit"*



Model A012
for Canon, Nikon and Sony DSLRs

**LENS USED:**

SP 15–30mm F/2.8 Di VC USD

SETTINGS:

Focal Length: 19mm

Exposure: F/22, 2 sec., ISO 200

LOCATION:

Mono Lake, California

STOP ONE: This saline basin just a few miles east of Yosemite National Park is more than a million years old. The lake's most intriguing feature is its tufa towers, formations made of calcium carbonate that jut out (some as tall as 30 feet high) all along the shoreline. A photo that appeared on the inside sleeve of Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here* album was taken at Mono Lake. Millions of birds also flock here each year to feed on the brine shrimp that thrive in this alkaline ecosystem. As we started our road trip and neared Lake Tahoe, André suggested we stop at Mono Lake. It was around sunset, though it was really overcast in some spots, so it wasn't the most colorful photo opportunity—but I decided to see what I could do. The wind that day was around 20mph, so the lake was really choppy. I wanted the water to appear as calm as possible, so I shot it with a 2-second exposure to soften the lake and give the illusion it was somewhat flat. I also added that foreground element to lend more dimension to the image. The 15–30 allowed me to capture the whole scene, which is such a strange place. It almost looks like a moonscape.



LENS USED:

SP 15-30mm F/2.8 Di VC USD

SETTINGS:

Focal Length: 15mm

Exposure: F/11, 1/5th second, ISO 200

LOCATION:

*Mobius Arch, Alabama Hills
Recreation Area, California*

STOP TWO: A couple of hours from Mono Lake is Lone Pine, home to the famous Mobius Arch, one of the big boulders in the Alabama Hills that have been chiseled away so that they're left with giant holes in the middle. It's one of the most interesting places visually: You have these smooth, rounded-down rock formations set against the granite spires of Mount Whitney, the highest mountain in the contiguous United States, in the Sierra Nevada. The Mobius Arch isn't a grand arch. It's only actually about 5 feet wide, and the spacing between the bottom and top of it is only about 4 feet. That's where the 15-30 lens comes into play. When you use a wide-angle lens to capture something like this and get as close as possible to it, it exaggerates the size of the arch in the foreground and makes it appear to be much larger than it really is, which is a neat effect.

STOP THREE: The Racetrack dry riverbed, also known as the playa, is one of those places that you have to take a trip to if you're out there. It's such a unique location, best known for the rocks that mysteriously slide across the playa, leaving their famous "tracks" behind them. We had to take the van on a 26-mile dirt road into the Racetrack, but it takes longer than you'd think to drive, because it's extremely rough terrain. We were bouncing around like crazy in the van! Unfortunately, because of the rain that had just fallen, there were rocks out there, but you couldn't really see the tracks they usually leave behind. Instead, I chose to show the texture of the cracked ground and to illustrate the scale of the place, because it's unbelievable: We started walking out on it and looked back at the van, and it looked like a Matchbox car. I placed that branch in the frame for context and captured the photo while taking advantage of the 15-30's minimum focusing distance of 11 inches to try and exaggerate the size of the branch against the playa.



LENS USED:

SP 15-30mm F/2.8 Di VC USD

SETTINGS:

Focal Length: 15mm

Exposure: F/14, 1/50 sec., ISO 400,

LOCATION:

*The Racetrack,
Death Valley National Park, California*

STOP FOUR: These dunes might look familiar to moviegoers: They've been used as a "set" for a bunch of movies, including the Star Wars films. Once again, we ran into some issues we didn't anticipate. Normally at sunrise or sunset, photographers try to get a picture here of the long shadows with the lines of the dunes. There were no shadows the morning we were there because the light was so flat. And, apparently, the area hadn't had any wind for a few days, so there were footprints everywhere. There went that idea! It turned out to be a blessing in disguise, however, because it forced me to look at the scene a lot differently and come up with a new plan. I decided to create an image that was all about lines, shapes, shadows, and forms. If you look closely, you'll see all the light and dark areas in the ripples of sand, but because there's some shadowing and highlighting going on in relation to where the sun is coming up, it gives the areas some shape. It actually looks like someone went through with a rake—there was one section that had these perfect curves. How does nature do that?



LENS USED:

SP 15-30mm F/2.8 Di VC USD

SETTINGS:

Focal Length: 20mm

Exposure: F/16, 1/50 sec., ISO 640,

LOCATION:

*Mesquite Flat Sand Dunes,
Death Valley National Park, California*

**LENS USED:**

SP 15-30mm F/2.8 Di VC USD

SETTINGS:

*Focal Length: 18mm
Exposure: F/22, 3 sec., ISO 100*

LOCATION:

*Canyon Junction Bridge,
Zion National Park, Utah*

STOP FIVE: This is probably the most photographed spot in Zion, overlooking the Virgin River. At sunset, you'll see 40 photographers lined up on the bridge taking pictures. We were there in the late fall, when there were no leaves on the trees, and it was really gray out—not the most ideal situation for a color picture. I immediately knew I'd be doing this as a black and white and concentrating on the tones and highlights, from the light gray to the dark gray of the mountain in the background to the highlight of the Virgin River against those two dark sides. I was also able to get really defined dimension and tones in the storm clouds that showed up around sunset, too. I shot this using a 3-second exposure with my camera on a tripod to get that creamy look to the water.

STOP SIX: The next morning we headed over to the opposite side of the park, where you'll find the Checkerboard Mesa, a sandstone butte that has crisscrossing horizontal and vertical lines to create a checkerboard-like pattern. It was raining when we got up before sunrise, but as we were driving, it started snowing, which created a perfect winter scene for me to photograph. I was also able to take advantage of one of the great aspects of the Southwest in the foreground: that vibrant red rock, which contrasted from the black-and-white photo I had taken the day before.



LENS USED:

SP 15-30mm F/2.8 Di VC USD

SETTINGS:

Focal Length: 19mm

Exposure: F/13, 6 sec., ISO 640

LOCATION:

Zion National Park, Utah

STOP SEVEN: When you hike along this trail—it's about a ¾-mile walk up—you get a stunning view of the lower canyon. What's interesting about this photo is that, if you compare this image to the previous one, you can see the extreme difference in the park depending on whether you're on the east side or the west side of the 1.1-mile Zion-Mt. Carmel Tunnel. This tunnel was originally built in the late 1920s to offer direct access from the park to Bryce Canyon and Grand Canyon National Park. The 15-30 lens worked so well in this case because of its 110-degree field of view. When you have such a wide field of view, if you don't include a foreground element in your image, you kind of get lost looking straight out. With the 15-30, I was able to include a really small foreground element, both sides with the valley walls, and the entire mountain. The foreground element framed the valley a little more and gave the image more depth.



LENS USED:

SP 15-30mm F/2.8 Di VC USD

SETTINGS:

Focal Length: 15mm

Exposure: F/8, 1/200th sec., ISO 100

LOCATION:

*Canyon Overlook Trail,
Zion National Park, Utah*



LENS USED:

SP 15-30mm F/2.8 Di VC USD

SETTINGS:

Focal Length: 30mm

Exposure: F/16, 1/80th sec., ISO 100

LOCATION:

Lake Powell (border of Utah and Arizona)

STOP EIGHT: Sprawled over the border between Utah and Arizona is Lake Powell, the second-largest man-made reservoir in the United States. It's created by the Glen Canyon Dam, right outside of Page, Arizona. A popular place to stop there is Lone Rock Beach, where you can actually go up right to the edge of the lake and camp. There's this giant rock formation in the middle of the lake that gives the place its name. There were some cool clouds in the sky when I was taking pictures, and using the 15-30 I was able to include the houseboats off to the right to add a human element to the image. The lake was a little choppy over by where Lone Rock was and a little smoother closer to us—I like how you can see the rocks in the foreground. But it wasn't until I was editing the images later that night that I realized what a perfect reflection showed up in this photo. Sometimes you don't realize until you go back later that you captured something this compelling.

STOP NINE: The great thing about photography is that no matter how long you've done it, there's always something you haven't really done much before, or at all. For me, that was star photography until I started trying it out a couple of years ago. We hadn't had many clear nights on the trip, but we finally got one when we arrived at the Paria Rimrocks, the red toadstool-like rock formations (also known as "goblins" or "hoodoos") within the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. To get a picture like this, there's a formula you can use to figure out how long to leave your shutter open without picking up the movement of the stars. I'm not big on mathematical equations, so what I do is use the widest-angle lens I have (in this case, the 15-30), open the aperture all the way up to F/2.8, and leave the shutter open for about 30 seconds. Using the widest focal length of 15mm also allowed me to get as much of the sky as possible, with the toadstools serving as a strong foreground element. You do have to be aware of light pollution in situations like this, but here it actually lent some formation to the rocks and a slightly different color to the image, which worked well. And I was able to get the Milky Way in the photo!



LENS USED:

SP 15-30mm F/2.8 Di VC USD

SETTINGS:

Focal Length: 15mm

Exposure: F/2.8, 30th sec., ISO 3200

LOCATION:

Paria Rimrocks, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, Arizona

STOP TEN: This slot canyon is separated into two sections: Upper Antelope Canyon (aka "The Crack") and Lower Antelope Canyon ("The Corkscrew"). The Upper is open to a lot more tourists, so I usually gravitate to the Lower because they restrict the number of people who can head in at one time—you're able to go in there for about two hours. It's a little more physically demanding, because you have to go up and down these ladders that descend into the slots, but it's worth it to squeeze through. Taking pictures in there is all about showing off those highlights you see at the top of the image I have here, especially where the two lines lead you to that one highlighted spot—that contrast ratio is so extreme. That dynamic range between the highlight and the shadow is usually too large and would require too many stops of light to capture, so I sacrifice the shadow details and just focus on the highlights. Some people will try to use HDR in this case to get all the details throughout the image, but I think the extreme shadow gives the photo more of a pleasing, realistic look.



LENS USED:

SP 15-30mm F/2.8 Di VC USD

SETTINGS:

Focal Length: 16mm

Exposure: F/16, 1.3 sec., ISO 400

LOCATION:

Antelope Canyon, Arizona



LENS USED:

SP 15-30mm F/2.8 Di VC USD

SETTINGS:

Focal Length: 15mm

Exposure: F/14, 1/13th sec., ISO 200

LOCATION:

Horseshoe Bend, Arizona

STOP ELEVEN: Just outside of Page is Horseshoe Bend, a famous bend in the Colorado River that's also become one of the most photographed areas in the Southwest. If you look carefully you can see that the rock is actually just a peninsula; it's not cut off by the river on the other side. It's also a relatively easy hike, maybe 10 minutes or so, to get up there. This is another ideal wide-angle photo opp. I've been here many times and tried to shoot this particular spot at 24mm or 28mm, and I just can't get it the way I want using those focal lengths: I have to crop too much off on either side, and I don't pick up any of the foreground. I end up sacrificing too much of the image. The 15-30 allowed me to capture the entire scene.



LENS USED:

SP 15–30mm F/2.8 Di VC USD

SETTINGS:

Focal Length: 21mm

Exposure: F/16, 1/20th sec., ISO 100

LOCATION:

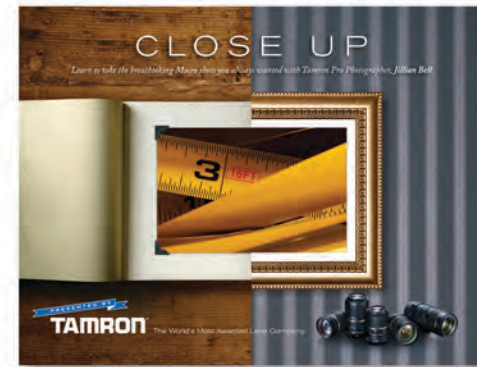
Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona

STOP TWELVE: The Grand Canyon doesn't need much introduction, but the rare cloud inversion we witnessed there does. This weather phenomenon—caused when clouds are forced into the valley and held down by warm air on top—only happens a few times every 10 years or so, though when we were there it had happened a couple of times over a two-week period. We were driving the van into the park and when we looked to the left, the canyon was filled with fog. We pulled over and headed up to Grandview Point. It was challenging to photograph, because so much of the canyon was enveloped in clouds. I had to figure out how to represent the scene and do it (somewhat) justice. The 15–30 helped me show the amazing view before my eyes. All I did was position a foreground rock in the frame; the light was hitting the tree on the left with this beautiful warm glow, and there was still a little of the North Rim you could see on the far side. It was one of the most surreal things I had ever seen: like I could just step out and walk across it.

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