

An Ansel Adams Encore

Scores of camera enthusiasts show up at Glacier Point for a celestial scene captured 57 years earlier. **By Roger W. Sinnott**

A PHOTOGRAPH IS NOT an accident — it is a concept,” Ansel Adams once wrote. “It exists at, or before, the moment of exposure of the negative.” So it was that just before sunset last September 15th, more than 200 photographers and a half dozen media crews converged on Yosemite National Park’s Glacier Point in California. It was our chance to capture the very same scene — a rising Moon over Gray Peak and Mount Starr King in the southeast — that the

great photographer had noticed and recorded, 57 years earlier to the day, in his classic image *Autumn Moon*.

What drew us there was the prediction of the Moon’s encore performance in *Sky & Telescope*’s October issue, page 40. The article’s authors, Donald W. Olson and Russell L. Doescher (Texas State University), were also on hand, along with Mitte Honors Program students Ashley Ralph and Kellie Beicker. “It happens once every 19 years,” Olson explained to reporters, “but first we had to work out the date of the original photograph, for which Ansel Adams gave various conflicting years. We also had to find the exact location of his camera, near what is called the Geology Hut.”

At 6:49 p.m., Olson interrupted a newspaper interview to call out the start of a 4-minute interval when the rising

Shortly before sunset, with the Moon about to rise as it had in the original, Donald Olson explained the unusual photographic opportunity to a newspaper reporter. Author Roger Sinnott, wearing the hat at right, has his own view camera at the ready.

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Russell Doescher’s image, taken from the very spot where Ansel Adams had set up his tripod 57 years earlier, shows the Moon at nearly the same phase and sky position. The sky appears brighter than in Adams’s original (October issue, page 41), partly because the Sun was 2° higher. But it’s possible that Adams used a red or yellow filter on his camera, and special darkroom techniques later, to subdue the sky in his black-and-white print.

Moon was in nearly the identical position. Under pellucid skies, the camera enthusiasts experienced the same magical low-Sun illumination that had entranced Adams years earlier. Those working digitally could immediately share their images with neighbors. But a few photographers had brought bulky view cameras, like the equipment Adams himself had used, and wouldn't know if they were successful until they got to their darkrooms back home.

"We do have lots of people showing up at Glacier Point for every full Moon," park ranger Dick Ewart marveled, "but it's never been like this." Perhaps there will be a similar gathering on September 15, 2024, when the Sun and Moon will once again create the same memorable scene.

S&T senior editor ROGER W. SINNOTT, who took a 5-by-7-inch view camera to Glacier Point and made nine exposures on black-and-white sheet film, hopes to discover the printing technique by which Ansel Adams made the Moon stand out so eerily.



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Above: With the Sun setting behind them at Glacier Point in Yosemite National Park, photographers readied their cameras to record the predicted special moment. Left: A cameraman from Fresno, California, TV Channel 47 was among those who photographed the scene. Behind him is Half Dome, the granite monolith that was the subject of several other Ansel Adams photographs.