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Local photographer's prize-winning submission developed in a split second

BY MILES BLUMHARDT
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It was one of those rare moments for a photographer when the stars align and you know you nailed the shot.

For Fort Collins photographer John Toliver, that special moment earned him World Wide Trails top Outdoor Photograph of 2007. The photo "Aspen and My Best Friend," beat out 2,300 photos submitted from 145 countries after judging by online viewers and a panel of judges. The photo, which was unanimously selected by the panel of professionals, shows a cyclist and her dog traveling a tunnel of golden aspen on Boreas Pass southeast of Breckenridge.

[Zoom Photo](#)



Courtesy of John R. Toliver

This photo by John R. Toliver of Fort Collins beat out 2,300 other images from more than 145 countries to win World Wide Trails' photo contest.

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"As soon as I saw the criteria they were looking for, I had the exact photo in mind," said Toliver, whose winning prize was a Garmin GPS unit. "When somebody sees my images, I want them to know exactly what I saw. If I get that compliment, I know that I took it right. I knew I nailed it."

Toliver didn't get much of a chance to shoot the winning photo with his Olympus 5050 point-and-shoot while out with a friend photographing aspen in their fall color. He had only enough time to shoot two images on his digital camera. He said the photo he submitted required little cropping, and that the strong lines and perfect light helped him capture the moment.

The judges agreed saying, "The composition from left to right taking you into the picture, the autumn light captured by the leaves and white tree trunks and most of all the biker with her dog giving you that real outdoor feeling (made this) without a doubt the best picture in the contest."

Toliver surfs online photography sites and has entered about a dozen other contests. He had some selected in the top 10 but had never won a contest. He has sold several images and also

The photo is of a cyclist and her dog traveling through a stand of aspen in September 2004 along the Boreas Pass Road near Breckenridge. Toliver recently retired as the deputy station director of the U.S. Forest Service's Rocky Mountain Research Station in Fort Collins.

[Zoom Photo](#)



JOHN TOLIVER

About John Toliver

Residence: Fort Collins since 1998

Occupation: Retired last week as deputy station director of the U.S. Forest Service's Rocky Mountain Research Station in Fort Collins.

Age: 62

Born: Robinson, Ill.

donates his images to charities for use in auctions.

He said initially that he and his friend stopped to shoot the alley of white aspen trunks with golden foliage. It was a beautiful setting but when the female and her dog appeared, it made for a shot that met the photo contest criteria of people recreating in the outdoors.

"I liked the curve of the road through the white trunks of the aspen that led my eye to the black hole (the dark spot in the background)," he said. "The lighting and composition were perfect. Then I saw this woman on a bicycle and her dog coming toward me. I don't know why I didn't shoot a front composition of her but I like to shoot silhouettes from behind so I let her go. I only shot two shots then a jeep came out of the black hole, which was a pretty neat photo in itself."

Toliver grew up loving the outdoors and as a Boy Scout hiked, camped and fished in rural southern Illinois. His first camera was a Kodak Brownie Hawkeye and since then is rarely found without his digital camera.

"I do landscapes but I love to shoot people, particularly people in the outdoors and kids playing,"

Hobbies: Photography and bass fishing

Winning shot camera: Olympus 5050 point-and-shoot

Current camera: Minolta Konica D7

Competition: World Wide Trails, www.WorldWideTrails.org

Toliver's Top 5 shooting tips

1. See the light. If something catches your eye, it's usually the light on something.
2. Always take a shot of the first thing you see because that first picture is what first caught your eye and the right light can be fleeting. Then you can compose the shot better.
3. Find something in the frame that leads your eye.
4. Always look around, especially behind you because there may be a better photograph.
5. You have to be out there to see it so get out often with your camera.

15 Nature/wildlife photography tips

Here are some helpful hints to improve your nature and wildlife photography:

1. Shoot for clean, simple compositions. Be especially careful of busy backgrounds. This produces a stronger image.
2. Shoot the same picture horizontally and vertically, from different angles and in different light.
3. Shoot each shot at different f-stops to make sure you have the correct exposure. This is called bracketing.

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he said. "I really like to capture their faces or the moment that makes people know what the people were doing."

As much as he and his wife enjoyed their stay in Fort Collins, Toliver's other passion prompted the couple to put their house up for sale for their dream retirement. The couple is building a log cabin on Toledo Bend Reservoir on the border of Louisiana and Texas.

"I'm an avid bass fisherman so now that I'm retired I plan on doing plenty of bass fishing and photography," he said.

4. Learn the behavior of wildlife. It will help you anticipate movement.
5. Use a motor drive for rapid firing.
6. Take advantage of changing weather conditions.
7. Frame the photo so the subject is just off-center and make sure the animal is not looking out of the frame but across it.
8. A hand-held camera with any shutter speed slower than 1/60th will likely result in a fuzzy or out-of-focus picture due to body movement. As a general rule, when shooting 1/60 or slower, use a tripod or cable release and shoot no slower than 1/250 of a second if hand-holding a telephoto lens or shooting fast-moving action.
9. Use a tripod, boulder, tree, etc., whenever possible to steady your shot.
10. Use the highest resolution setting on your digital camera, usually fine or superfine.
11. Shoot at the animal's eye level, not yours, to put viewers into direct eye contact with the animal.
12. Sunrise and sunset usually produce the best natural light, and that's when wildlife is most active.
13. Wildlife in motion is usually a stronger photo than one where the wildlife is still.
14. Take a class or read books on photography.
15. Be very patient. You will be rewarded.




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