

Timeprints in the Sand



When the trek starts, you're walking across an open wash of fine sand and clay. Prior rainfall runoff has created a flat surface patina. Beware ~ when it rains! This patina turns to globules of sticky mud...

A hundred yards away, you come to the first small gully. Onward, then a deeper 6 foot gully. Wind through some low knobby hills. Go around a north stretching ridge.

Scenery really hasn't changed much. But, each step you take steps back in time...

Maybe you read about it somewhere or saw a video. The low knobby hills are made from rock, sand, and shale that were created more than 60 million years ago. In effect, you're walking in a time machine.

Eventually, you come to time prints from highly unusual hoodoos. Back in late Cretaceous time, this region was the edge of a great seaway which split North America. Beaches, lagoons, peat bogs, slow lazy rivers - a land where dinosaurs enjoyed copious greenery.

When you mention dinosaurs, you immediately think about those great winged beasts - pterodactyls. Instead of just landlubbers, pterodactyls could fly.

You round the corner and start up a hidden wash. You round another corner... suddenly, fantasy memory takes immediate flight.



You'd timed arrival to shoot near sunset.

Ahead of you, outlined in setting sun, atop the ridge, is the most dramatic hoodoo you've ever seen.

Standing in majestic splendor atop intimately carved base is an object which reminds you of a B-52 coming in for a landing.

Now that's how you'd think if you are a today's technocrat.

But, if you took a dinosaur's artistic viewpoint and thought in timeprints, these flat winged objects could simply be pterodactyls enthroned on a natural, carved base, about to take flight in eternal search of food.

As you get closer, it's apparent each pterodactyl is more like a mother ship. Smaller, more oblate drones are found nearby. One late afternoon image, on the dark side of the ridge, still shows lighter units in the shadows. Might they become future pterodactyls?

With time, unsupported rock tends to break and fall to the ground. A shrewd eye finds a lonely, alien piece lying on the ground between first and second mother ship.

If I were just a photographer, then I would be describing these images in somewhat drier, more technical terms - beauty, drama, other worlds, even fine art. But, as a storyteller, as a student of Tony Hillerman, and geologist, I'm blessed with an awareness of many paradigms.

The first time I saw a picture of these winged hoodoos, my literary muse immediately coined the collective title, "Winged Marvles!" Then, one morning, I awoke. It was time to write; it was time to describe how your footprints could become mental timeprints. It was time to tell you a fascinating story.

... that's the way it happens for me!



With days end near, I shot one last image set. I could see strange, if not surreal shapes, the fairest flair of sunset color, even a small cloud bank highlighting 'my' winged marvels. I wanted to take home a truly deep memory of this marvelous find. I wanted to capture the fundamental essence of ancient times. I wanted to celebrate sky, light, and such exotic figures. I wanted to show what eons of water can do. Water ~ Mother Earth's master carving knife!

Telling this story binds me to natural beauty and incredible shapes found in the Bisti Badlands. Trying to imagine how local denizens saw things breaks me away from conventional if not prosaic HDR photography description. Describing a plot around pictures of ancient time prints sets me free; lets me, like a winged pterodactyl, take off. Perhaps in fantasy; certainly with a new and different paradigm.

Dinosaurs and pterodactyls are gone now. A footprint here, a bone there - or seemingly immortal hoodoo shapes carved as timeprints, captured on a digital sensor, and transformed into fine art.

Dinosaur, pterodactyl, film - how many measures are there of man's mortality?

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