

The Lee Shapiro Memorial Monument Valley Album

Lloyd Eby
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Overview of Monument Valley, from the entrance. There's a hotel there now, overlooking the Valley. The hotel is situated on one of John Ford's favorite and iconic camera-placement positions. You can see the road that runs through the Valley, and if you are familiar with Ford's movies, you will recognize that his stagecoach traveled this road in one or more of his movies.

We (Ginger and I) just returned from a 10-day photo safari of the American Southwest (Arizona and Utah). Although we saw and photographed much more than this, from the beginning I thought of this as the Monument Valley tour because I had never been there before, and because I am a John Ford fan and Ford shot many of his most memorable and most iconic movies in Monument Valley (Stagecoach, My Darling Clementine, She Wore a Yellow Ribbon, The Searchers, and others) — indeed, although many other movie makers have used this location and many other films have been shot there, Ford, more than anyone else, established Monument Valley as THE Western setting.



El Capitan monument, outside of Monument Valley, but on the road to the Valley. Generally regarded as the gateway rock to Monument Valley.



John Ford Point, with tourists.

My late friend Lee Shapiro — for those who do not know him he was a movie maker himself whose most important movie was the documentary about the Sandinista's mistreatment of the Miskito Indians in

Nicaragua, entitled “Nicaragua Was Our Home,” and who was killed in Afghanistan in 1987 while trying to make a documentary about the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan — was also an admirer of John Ford; Lee visited Monument Valley at least one time because of his admiration of Ford and Ford’s movies.

Of the more than 4000 pictures we took on this tour, I’ve selected nine of mine from Monument Valley, and I’m putting them in this album that I’m dedicating to the **memory and honor of Lee Shapiro**).



Wide angle view from John Ford Point. Again, you can see the dirt road through the Valley, with a car on it. In a Ford movie, that would have been a stagecoach and/or horses.



Many of the monuments and spires in Monument Valley have been given names, but I don’t know those names.



Overview of Monument Valley from the hotel balcony, just before sunrise. Numerous photographers had gathered on that balcony that morning to photograph the sunrise, but nobody talked except in very small whispers; except for the sound of cameras clicking there was a sacred silence — a palpable religious and worshipful atmosphere. The Navahos, who control Monument Valley, consider it to be a sacred place, and indeed it is.



Monument Valley Sunrise.



Monument Valley sunrise.

I actually found myself in tears while writing that memorial to Lee and assembling the photographs.

Lee took me to see the original “Star Wars,” telling me it was the greatest movie ever made. (He tended to say that about whatever movie he had just seen and liked a lot.) It wasn’t, but it was memorable nevertheless, and I’ve found myself appreciating it more as time goes on. Also, he was shooting the film he was trying to make in Afghanistan in Super-16 using an Aaton camera. (Super-16 was a wide-format 16 mm format that used 16mm stock that had sprocket holes on only one side, extending the image across what would have been the sprocket-hole part of one side of the film; the result was a 1.67: 1 aspect ratio, not quite as wide as the 1.85:1 of standard 35mm wide screen, but greater than the 1.37:1 of standard 16mm.) I think Lee thought of his proposed Afghanistan documentary as his Monument Valley movie.