



Wyoming, 1988: Michael Quinton immortalized a bull elk standing in the early morning smoke of the Yellowstone National Park fires.



Nebraska, 2004: Jim Richardson's image captures workers pausing while haying in the sand hills to watch with concern and awe as rolling thunderheads fill the afternoon sky.



Oregon, 1997: William Allard photographed American Indian Beauty Pageant winner Acosia Red Elk waiting for a parade in the tipi village at the Pendleton Round-Up.



Arizona, 2007: A shaft of light bisects the Navajo Sandstone shapes of Antelope Canyon in Frans Lanting's photo.

# Best of the WEST

**Who:** Ansel Adams, William Albert Allard and other photographers  
**What:** 'National Geographic Greatest Photographs of the American West' exhibit  
**When:** Reception 5:30 p.m., Allard talk 6:30 p.m. Friday; family activities 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday; exhibit hangs through April 28  
**Where:** National Museum of Wildlife Art  
**How much:** Free for members, \$5 for others Friday; with museum admission Saturday on  
**Web:** WildlifeArt.org, PhotographsOfTheWest.org

By Lindsay Wood

This weekend, the National Museum of Wildlife Art will take part in an unprecedented, simultaneous 10-museum debut of "National Geographic's Greatest Photographs of the American West."

With an opening reception at 5:30 p.m. Friday, the wildlife art museum will display a photographic narrative, both romantic and realistic, of the ideals, legends and majesty of the American West. The official public opening is Saturday, when there will be activities for families from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

A four-person curatorial team — James McNutt, the museum's president; Adam Harris, its curator; Rich Clarkson, National Geographic's former director of photography; and Kate Brainerd, Geographic's former

picture editor and graphic designer — chose each photograph from Geographic's image collection to reflect the best work from files spanning 125 years.

"National Geographic Greatest Photographs of the American West" represents the first time a photography exhibition of this magnitude has opened at so many U.S. venues simultaneously," McNutt said. "The exhibition presents a powerful and nuanced portrait of the West over more than a century, and it's exciting that the medium of photography allows multiple openings across the country for greater impact in sharing the combined vision of such an important group of photographers."

Underwritten by the Mays Family Foundation, the exhibit comprises 75 images from famed lensmen such as William Henry Jackson, Ansel Adams, William Albert Allard and Joel Sartore. Some of the photographs will be familiar; others have never before been seen by the public. A soft-cover companion book designed by Brainerd and featuring 185 photographs from National Geographic's files is available for \$30 at the museum shop and online from National Geographic Books.

Allard, whose photograph of 1970s buckaroo Brian Morris graces the cover of the "Greatest Photographs

of the American West" book, will speak at the reception about some of the stories behind his five photographs in the exhibit and 14 in the book. He also plans to take questions from the audience.

Allard began a "love affair" with the West on one of his first National Geographic assignments as a staff photographer, and he's been hooked ever since. On the cusp of his 49th year as a professional photographer, Allard said he considers the images chosen for the exhibit and book some of his most iconic works.

A love of the West is what prompted McNutt and Clarkson to hatch the idea of a multiple exhibit launch over lunch in 2007. The National Museum of Wildlife Art is part of Museums West, a collaborative of 13 museums that focus on the advancement of Western American art, history and culture. The consortium was the catalyst for the large-scale opening at 10 of the 13 museums.

Using his connections with National Geographic, Clarkson got access to the magazine's 100,000-photo vault, and the exhibit idea gained momentum. The team whittled the number of potential photographs from 2,000 to 500, then sorted the chosen images by four categories: legends, encounters, boundaries and visions.

McNutt and Harris took a more

historical, educational approach to selecting photos for the book and exhibit, while Clarkson and Brainerd leaned toward a more editorial point of view, Clarkson said.

The curatorial process was fun for everyone, thanks to the "rich mother lode" of content to choose from in the National Geographic archives, Clarkson said.

"Four other people might have come up on a lot of different things," McNutt said of the collection, "but would have hit on a few of the same things as well."

The oldest image in the collection, a stereograph titled "Mountain of the Holy Cross" by William Henry Jackson, was taken 1,500 feet up Notch Mountain in Colorado in 1873. Jackson was the first person to capture the snowy crosslike ridges in the side of the mountain.

The photograph symbolizes early American ideology and a photographer's drive to convey that message. This drive to accurately represent the Western spirit is portrayed throughout the exhibit, and visitors will get a sense of what the American West was and what the future holds for its inhabitants.

"America still has a fascination with the West, the cowboy, the settlers, the history," Clarkson said. "It's the core of what so many Americans love."



Wyoming, 1999: In Norbert Rosing's image, bison — enduring symbols of the American West — roam freely through the Lion Geyser area in Yellowstone, America's first national park.