

GHOST TOWNS In Focus

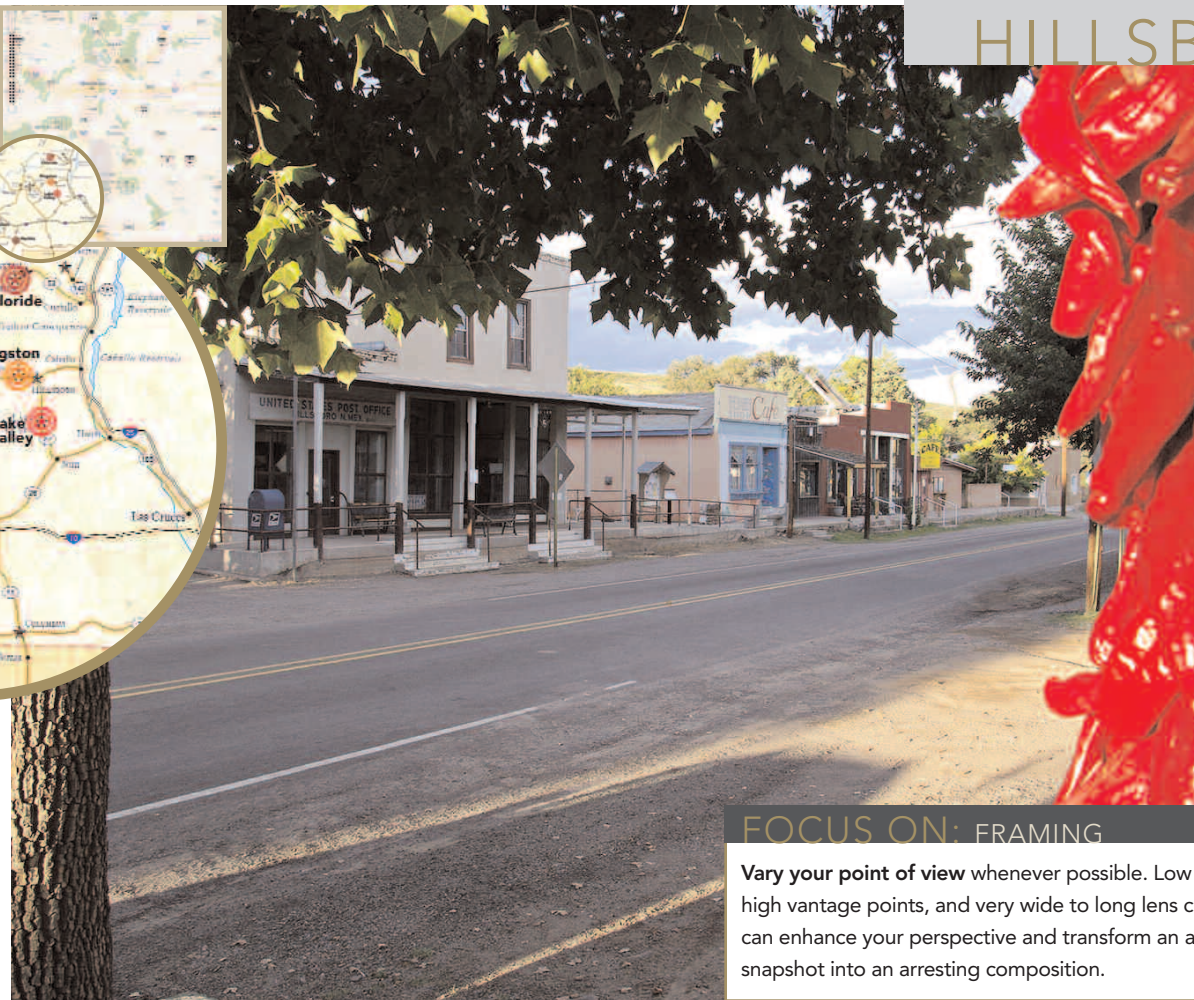
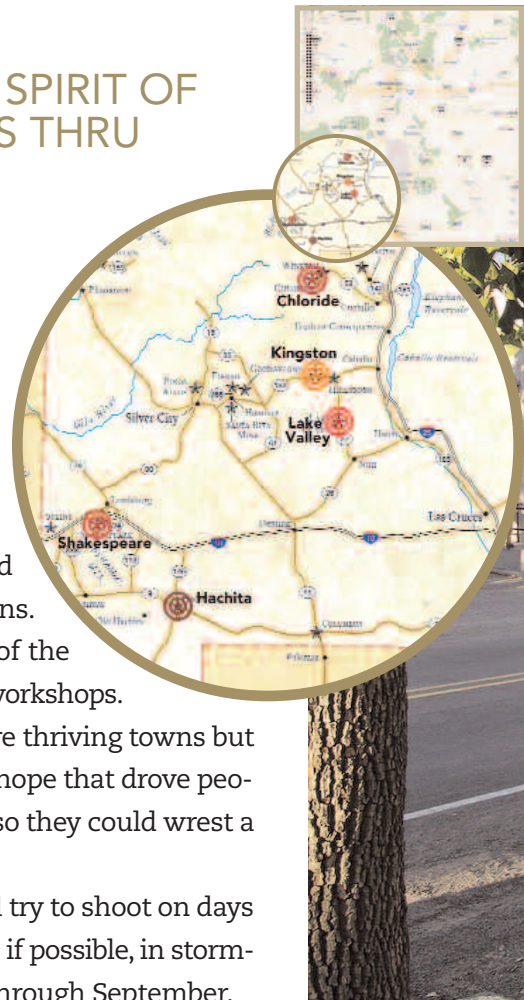
CAPTURING THE SPIRIT OF HISTORIC PLACES THRU A CAMERA LENS

BY KERRICK JAMES

I have been fascinated with ghost towns since I was a young boy. I read books about Western history and explored scattered ghost towns with my family. When I got to college, I picked up photography and enjoyed driving around the West myself, always stopping to shoot ghost towns. Eventually, my interest led to photographing the book, "Ghost Towns of the Southwest" (Voyageur Press, 2010), and leading ghost town photography workshops.

It's challenging to illustrate the spirit of isolated places that once were thriving towns but are now swiftly crumbling back into the earth. How does one evoke the hope that drove people to remote, hot, and savage frontiers to labor in underground mines so they could wrest a future for themselves and their families?

To capture that aura, I look for symbolic elements and structures, and try to shoot on days with grand sweeping clouds, which add dimension to the landscape, and if possible, in storm-light. In the Southwest, monsoon season typically lasts from mid-July through September.



HILLSBORO

● Hillsboro, named after the rolling hills that surround it, sprang into life in 1877 when two prospectors exploring the Black Mountains discovered rich gold float along Percha Creek. Today, Hillsboro is a semi-ghost town—about 150 people still live there—with wonderful adobe cottages and quiet lanes to wander. The Hillsboro General Store, opened in 1879, served as the town's post office, bank, and stagecoach stop at one time or another.

The classic Main Street conjures images of a town of wealth. Indeed, Hillsboro mines once produced about \$6 million in gold and silver when gold was \$20.67 per ounce. Surely such wealth drew outlaws, and the Hillsboro jail, though only partially standing, is one of the finest jails left in any ghost town. The heavy iron doors and grills are graphic symbols of justice in the frontier West. They benefit greatly from the monochrome plus sepia look, which can be executed in camera or in your computer at home. Nearby, ruins of the 1892 courthouse's graceful brick arch frames a cloudy sum-

FOCUS ON: FRAMING

Vary your point of view whenever possible. Low angles, high vantage points, and very wide to long lens choices can enhance your perspective and transform an average snapshot into an arresting composition.

CHLORIDE

● Named after its rich and distinctive silver chloride ore, the town was discovered in 1879 along Mineral Creek by a mule skinner named Harry Pye. Apaches soon killed Pye, but his rowdy town boomed on silver during the 1880s. The Panic of '93 nearly destroyed the town, but later discoveries of copper, lead, and zinc kept it alive until 1931.

Today, only nine people still live here. My favorite images are of the weathered wooden facades. A gift shop and the Pioneer Store constitute the business district. The Pioneer Store was a literal time capsule, boarded up in 1923 and sealed with all its inventory intact. When Don and Dona Edmund bought the store in 1989, they found a treasure trove of history, as no one



FOCUS ON: TIMING

Look for **leading lines** [SUCH AS THE PATH SHOWN HERE] that pull the viewer's eye into the frame and through it to the main subject.

LAKE VALLEY

● Lake Valley was little more than a stage station in 1878, when cowboy George Lufkin found a piece of silver ore. This rich specimen led to the 1881 discovery of the Bridal Chamber, a room-size vault of pure native silver that yielded more than 3.5 million ounces of the white metal. One chunk of silver weighed more than 4,500 pounds! Lufkin died a pauper, as so many get-rich-quick schemers do, but Lake Valley became well-to-do, with 4,000 residents, 12 saloons, hotels, and a 1904 schoolhouse that still stands today.

Most of the buildings are long gone, lost to a fire in 1895 or torn down for their precious wood to build other ephemeral towns. The structures that do exist can only be shot as exteriors, but the setting is magnificent in its loneli-



FOCUS ON: UNIQUENESS

Consider using a **sepia filter** to accentuate the visual connection to an earlier time. Consider using a **sepia filter** to accentuate the visual connection to an earlier time.

SHAKESPEARE

● Shakespeare has a checkered past. Founded on the promise of water in 1868, it boomed during a diamond and ruby scam in the early 1870s, busted flat, then found new life and its present name during a silver boom that began in 1879.

Today the town is a shadow of its former prosperous self, but evocative structures with great character still survive. The Grant House stage station, the Stratford Hotel, the blacksmith shop, the hanging room complete with a noose—all exhibit the patina of age and exude the aura of past lives. Unlike many ghost towns where buildings are unsafe to enter, here you can shoot indoors; many rooms still feature telling details. I especially love the old saloon, with its well-worn plank floor and spartan decor. I can actually picture patrons bellying up to the bar, emptying bottles, and engaging in conversation.

FIND IT: Located just 4 miles south of Lordsburg and close to Interstate 10. Shakespeare is privately owned and operated, and is only open on special weekends and by appointment. (575) 542-9034; shake-sppeareghostown.com.



FOCUS ON: ATMOSPHERE

Give your images life and impact by including telling **details that hint at the people who lived** in these spaces.

OLD HACHITA



FOCUS ON: DEPTH

Be patient with clouds, as sometimes you'll be rewarded with flowing shapes that add needed energy and drama.

● Fewer than 20 miles from the Mexican border, down a dusty, unmarked ranch road, lie the fairly extensive remains of Old Hachita. This oft-overlooked ghost town began to boom in the mid-1870s when silver, gold, and copper were discovered in hostile Apache country. By 1890, only 25 people remained. They eventually left for new Hachita in 1902, when the El Paso & Southwestern Railroad came through and provided jobs.

Go to Old Hachita to experience a real ghost town, totally absent of people or services. You'll find about 20 structures, from naked foundations and crumbling adobes to ore-crushing equipment and dangerous open vertical shafts. Under a harsh sky, Old Hachita feels like a Western movie set. I love the fabulous clouds coursing overhead, and the adobes framed by ocotillos and inhabited by snakes.

FIND IT: From new Hachita, drive 4.7 miles west on Highway 9 to a gravel road on the left (south). Turn left, pass through the gate (close

PHOTO TIPS:

- Consider using a **sepia filter** to accentuate the visual connection to an earlier time.
- Look closely at **how light plays across a scene**, be it a solitary building or an old main street. Shooting in early or late sun can provide a richer color palette and lessen the harsh contrast of mid-day.
- **Be patient with clouds**, as sometimes you'll be rewarded with flowing shapes that add needed energy and drama.
- Look for **leading lines** [SUCH AS THE PATH SHOWN HERE] that pull the viewer's eye into the frame and through it to the main subject.
- **Vary your point of view** whenever possible. Low angles, high vantage points, and very wide to long lens choices can enhance your perspective and transform an average snapshot into an arresting composition.
- Simplify the photograph and heighten impact by **eliminating distracting or unneeded subjects**. **Zoom in** to fill the frame with the most important elements or move around to **find the best angles**.
- When the light and clouds are perfect, **shoot every possible variation** you can think of, as the occasion may never be repeated.
- Give your images life and impact by including telling **details that hint at the people who lived** in these spaces.

📍 Travel journalist Kerrick James resides in Mesa, Arizona. He leads a variety of photo tours to locations in the U.S. and around the world through Trafalgar. For an extended interview with photographer Kerrick James, go to AAA.com/newmexicojourney.