

GET OUT 

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PHOTOS BY QUANG-TUAN LUONG

Nature photographer points his lens at Congaree

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PHOTOGRAPHER Quang-Tuan Luong has visited all 58 U.S. National Parks, in what began as a search for beauty and has grown into a planned book on the park system.

He stopped at Congaree Swamp National Monument in 1998, sticking to the raised boardwalk trail on a short hike. With the re-designation of the old-growth hardwood forest in Richland County as Congaree National Park in 2003, Luong had to return for a closer look.

Naturalist John Cely took Luong into the depths of the park in November, and Luong came away with some stunning photos. If you've never been to the park, you can get a taste of the beauty by viewing the photos at www.terrageria.com. It'll make you want to head out for a hike.

(He also captured images from Beaufort, Columbia and Charleston.

You can check out, or buy, copies of those images or his gorgeous photos from other parks.)

Luong plans to return to a few of the parks this year and have a book out in time for the 2008 holiday season.

Via e-mail, Luong answered a few questions:

How did you get started on this quest to capture the beauty of all the U.S. National Parks?

A mountain climber, the French-born Luong came to the University of California at Berkeley in 1993 because it was the closest research university to Yosemite. After several visits to Yosemite, he took in Denali in Alaska, then Death Valley, then the parks in southern Utah.

"I had fallen in love with the national parks so much that after the end of my tenure at Berkeley, I decided to extend my stay in the USA long enough for me to visit all of them."

By then, repetitive stress injury in his wrists had prompted a shift from climbing mountains to photographing them.

"I initially picked up photography as a means to communicate to people who weren't there the wonders I had seen on the high peaks. Likewise, I also wanted to document the parks in a way that would do justice to their splendor."

What did you think of Congaree National Park?

"I always felt that the bald cypress trees growing out of water, with knees and Spanish moss, represented the most iconic nature scene in the whole American South and Southeast.

"(Cely) took me on the river,

which let me appreciate even more the tranquility and peacefulness of the place, when you are gliding silently amongst reflections. On the first day, there was a light drizzle and some mist that created a beautifully mysterious atmosphere. Combined with the colors of autumn, this was one of my most rewarding walks in a forest."

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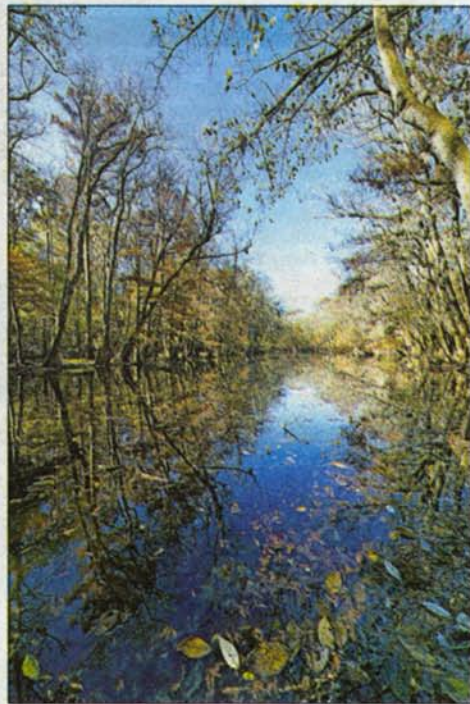
QUANG-TUAN LUONG,
Photographer

Park that surprised you?

"I was expecting to see much more water in the park. The place was quite dry for a swamp. Looking at the canopy, I was also surprised by its height, since in my visits to other eastern forests I found them to be much less tall

CHECK IT OUT

You can view Quang-Tuan Luong's photos from Congaree and other national parks at www.terrageria.com.



than some in the West."

If somebody who has seen only the grand parks in the West were planning a trip to Congaree, what would you say to them to prepare them for the differences?

"The contrast between the grand parks in the West and Congaree is akin to that between a mural-size romantic painting and a highly detailed medieval miniature. Both of them are rich and beautiful, but you have to look at the miniature from a closer distance, and possibly hold it in your hand.

"The grand parks overwhelm you immediately with the sheer size of the landscape even if you just stand at an overlook. At Congaree, you have to take a long walk, let the forest surround you, look up and down, and give yourself some time to absorb the atmosphere and discover the beauty in the details."

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