



Photography can instantly fill us with awe and humble us with a new perspective about our place in the world. Strolling in the presence of great cliffs of rock, magnificent waterfalls and the spectacular colors during the change of seasons makes us feel like specs on a giant canvas. A trip to a great park like Starved Rock State Park in Illinois can have that effect. Walking along hiking paths is a great escape from city life. There is something refreshing and calming about taking a few silent hours to breathe, think, and enjoy the solitude – or the chance to reconnect with those who join you for the journey. Being able to capture the experience and bring it home and relive it later – or share it with others – is a gift that photography makes possible. Thankfully, advances in computer technology make it possible for anyone to capture these memorable images.

Starved Rock State Park is an amazing playground for photographers. It's free and the walking paths are accessible at sunrise for those amazing photo shots we like to capture. The choice of subject can fill many days. There are beautiful waterfalls, great cliffs or rock formations, river views, and canyons that twist and turn to provide unforgettable views. I've been there in the summer and made the 2+ hour trip from Chicago again

in the fall. It was worth it. The fall colors were stunning, but a trip anytime during the year won't disappoint.



To get this shot of the cliffs adjacent to the St. Louis waterfall, I utilized picture stitching. A series of three photos, taken side by side were merged together to produce the final photo. The key things to keep in mind is that the photos need to be taken from the same location to combine easily. A tripod can assist in capturing picture that can fit together, but this panoramic series was taken with a hand-held camera. A good lens that allows you to get more are in each shot is an advantage too, but you can always take more photo as needed. When taking photos, press and hold down the A-EL (AutoExposure-Lock) button on the camera to fix the exposure so all the photos will be taken with the same exposure.

Merging the photo can be done easily and inexpensively in a number of photography programs available. I like Microsoft's ICE (Image Composite Editor) because it's free, very intuitive to use, and provide a number of options for combining photos with different lens formats. The program can even use technology to "complete" a photo if there is a section of the panoramic missing after the pictures have been combined. You can find lots of option by Googling "photo stitching" on your computer.

## TAKEAWAYS

1. Enjoy trips to national parks and outdoors adventure. The photos capture can be wonderful, but the experience of exploring these great spaces is it's own reward.
2. Return to great spaces for a second. There are always new adventures you missed the first time. The added benefits of experiencing the same location during a different season (or even a different time of day) can be rewarding.
3. Start early during peak tourist season to avoid the crowds. You can also get photos with people present, but often the addition of people brings enormous perspective on the size and scope of images captured.
4. If you are looking for more information about photo stitching, order the free guide available below.