Field Practices Related to Image Transfer and Storage
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Nature Photography Adventures

As we explore the world with groups of photographers, the single biggest source of frustration and disappointment is related to moving images from the camera to the computer while in the field.

It seems like it should be a fairly simple process to move images from your memory card to a laptop – and it is.

Here's our preferred option:

1. Put your memory card into a card reader and attach it to your computer
2. Create a folder and subfolders on your laptop hard drive (or attached portable hard drive – or both)
    a. Folder name: Trip Year (Tanzania 2010)
    b. Subfolder name: 1, 2, 3, etc.
3. Use your Windows or Mac operating system to copy and paste the files from your flash memory to the appropriate folder
4. Continue with the next card – or the next day's photography
5. Later you can change those subfolder numbers to locations or activities if desired – even split up the folders as need to make your organization more defined.

Why is this so hard? It isn't.

But, a surprising percentage of you have installed software that automatically does it for you. In the process, some of that software puts images places you can't find them. Other software stores your images in a way only that particular software can retrieve them (easily).

And, worst of all, some of you have more than one software program installed, both (or 3 or 4) of which grab the images and move them to your hard drive (this isn't a backup system if they all go to the same hard drive at once).

We have seen really smart people reduced to tears fighting with these "do it for you" software programs. And we've seen hard drives filled to capacity with multiple copies of the same images. Argh!

And it can be difficult or awkward to uninstall programs in the field.

So, before you head out into the field (with us, someone else, or alone) get rid of or disable those programs. Or, if you really want to use a program, choose **one** and get to know it before your departure. Make sure everything goes as you expect and want it to. And make sure you can get to those images later without using the program if you decide you don't like it – or it crashes on you. Or you decide to change operating systems.

Another quick observation. We don't encourage plugging the camera to the computer to transfer images.

A card reader is a simple device that uses power from the computer and enables you to smoothly transfer images onto the computer or hard drive.

The camera has its own electrical system and – sure – they say they've worked out all the details in having the two electrical systems talk to each other. But, we've been witness to a time or two when that interface wasn't smooth – and the photographer had to go without a camera for the rest of the trip.

The choice is yours.

There is another problem these days.

Many of you show up in the field with new equipment – and head out to capture great new images – in RAW format.

But, you haven't checked before leaving home to see if your browser (Bridge, Lightroom, etc.) or photo editor (Photoshop, Lightroom, Elements) recognizes your new RAW image format.

Camera manufacturers are constantly updating their RAW image formats – it seems like every new camera comes out with its own new RAW version. And plug-ins need to be downloaded and installed before your software can parse the file and show you an image.

Please, before you head into the field, make some test images, download them, and make sure all of your software can work with your RAW files.

If you take care of the issues above, then once you get into the field, your focus will be on photography and your captured images. It's just no fun to wrestle with uncooperative software or try to download updates on a remote dial-up connection.

One last note. When your image transfer is complete, _and_ you have verified that you have the images where you want them (we copy them to two drives), then put the card back in the camera you intend to use and format it there.

Don't use the computer to erase the images and just start recording more. Format your card in the camera you will use the card in! It is good to format the card right away so you aren't confused about whether you downloaded it or not. Then out in the field, if you are traveling with multiple cameras, reformat the card when you insert it in the body so your metafiles will recognize it.