



Western Portraits: Glacier N.P.

Photography and Words by
Steve Salis



About this book

I've traveled and photographed much of the North American West, from the deserts of the south to the tundra of the north. I've hiked hundreds of miles in the Rockies from New Mexico to the Yukon. My favorite hiking destination is Glacier National Park in northwest Montana. I've photographed it nearly every year since 1994.

The variety of scenery and wildlife here is unmatched. The images in these pages cannot compare to being there.

I hope they encourage you to go and explore this magnificent place yourself.

Steve Salis

I've photographed over half the national parks in the US and many more in Western Canada. Glacier National Park in northwest Montana is my favorite. Its over 1,600 square miles include temperate rain forest, prairie, spectacular mountains, streams, lakes and, of course, glaciers. In 2008 there were fewer than 50 glaciers in the park. By 2030 they will all be gone. I've visited the park nearly every year since 1994. I have seen for myself that the ice continues to shrink as it has since it was first explored by westerners in the 1850s.

These pages illustrate my attempt to capture beauty in the park. Some images were captured along the stunning 52 mile Going to the Sun Road. However, most were taken while hiking the park's 730 mile trail system. On a typical day hike, still and video cameras were carried 10 to 15 miles over terrain that rises and falls 1,500 to 3,000 feet from a base of around 5,000 feet. Distance is not the only challenge. Weather changes quickly in the mountains. It's important to be prepared and to embrace change. Shining sun turns to rain, sleet or snow with little warning. As if that wasn't enough, this is grizzly bear country.

It is said that you appreciate things, including images, more when it takes time and effort to acquire them. I hope you agree.

Steve Salis

January, 2009



Piegan Pass

The nine mile trail tops out at near 8,000 feet. The tree line is about 6,500 feet, allowing for unrestricted alpine views.

© Steve Salis



Swiftcurrent Lake

The sunrise behind the Many Glacier Hotel is often stunning.

© Steve Sallis



Fog on Swiftcurrent Lake

Before sunrise fog often settles in the Many Glacier Valley.

© Steve Sallis



The Many Glacier Hotel

With 208 rooms, this is the largest hotel in the park. It was built by the Great Northern Railroad between 1910 and 1915.

© Steve Salis





Many Glacier Hotel lobby



Many Glacier Hotel Lobby

On a cold day there is no better place to relax than in front of this large wood burning fireplace. Especially after completing one of the many trails in the area.

© Steve Salis



Bowman Lake

20 miles of gravel road is the only way to drive to this little jewel nestled in the northwest corner of the park. If solitude is what you seek, this is the place to find it.

© Steve Salls



Lake Josephine

Boat tours are offered on the larger lakes in Glacier. This one doubles as a hiker ferry for those destined for Grinnell Glacier.

© Steve Sallis



The view from Ptarmigan Tunnel

5.2 miles and 2,300 feet above the trailhead is this view looking north from the tunnel. Minutes after this shot was taken the valley was enveloped in fog. Soon there was thunder and heavy sleet. Making the return interesting.

© Steve Sallis





The church in Babb, MT.

For six years I wanted to take a memorable image of this church, located near the Many Glacier entrance. On this day I watched and waited as the rainbow moved towards the church door, then I had my pot of gold.

© Steve Salis



Wild Goose Island and St. Mary's Lake

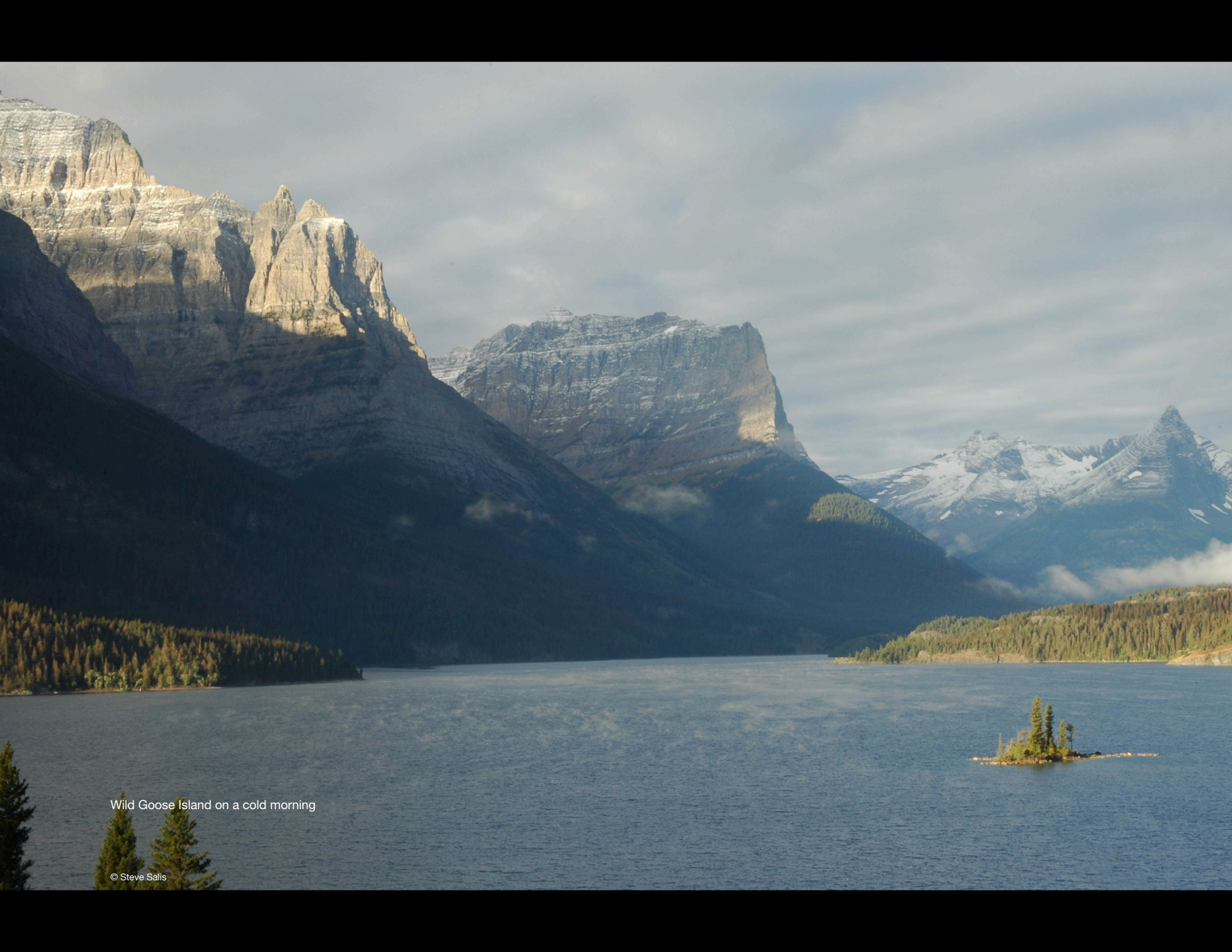
This view, just off the Going to the Sun Road, is one of the icons of the park. The next few images show how changing light alters this beautiful scene.

Wild Goose Island Rainbow

This shot was taken a few minutes after the image on the previous page. When photographing in Glacier it pays to be patient.

© Steve Salis





Wild Goose Island on a cold morning



St. Mary's Lake on a stormy morning



Wild Goose Island and St. Mary's Lake on a sunny fall day



Evening over Wild Goose Island

Calm waters at Wild Goose

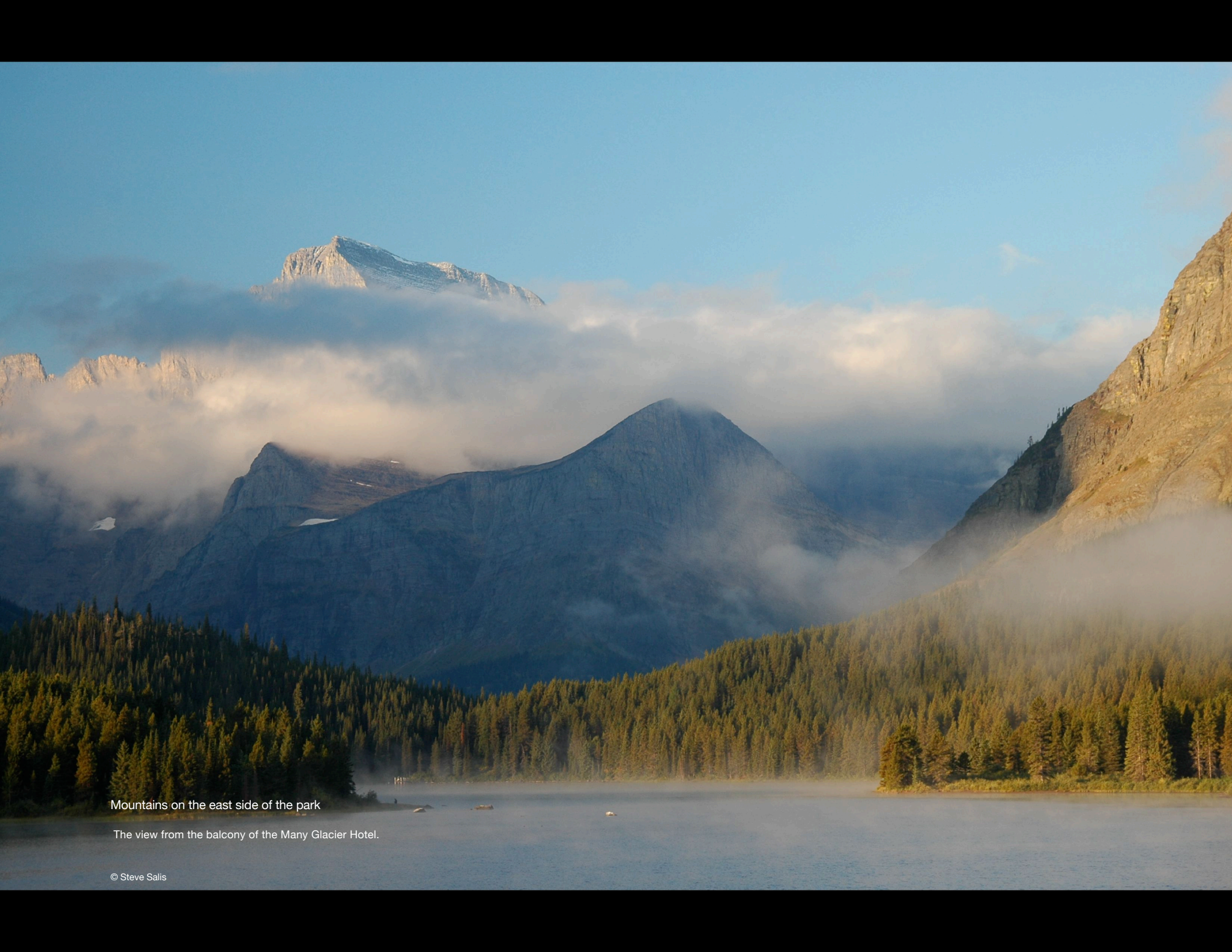
© Steve Salis



Mid morning at Wild Goose

© Steve Salis





Mountains on the east side of the park

The view from the balcony of the Many Glacier Hotel.

© Steve Sallis



The Grinnell Glacier Trail

The Grinnell Glacier Trail is my favorite trail in the park.
I've hiked it more than a dozen times, beginning in 1994.

© Steve Salis



Ginnell Glacier

This view makes the 10 mile hike with 1,700 feet of elevation well worth the effort. This lake is at just over 6,600 feet. The Glacier is over 1/2 mile from this spot. Look carefully to see two hikers near the shore at the left.

© Steve Sallis



Salamander Glacier, in the center left, was connected to Grinnell Glacier until the 1930s. The cliff face rises about 1,500 ft. from the water.

© Steve Salls



Grinnell Glacier in 2007

The ice covers over 300 acres and is more than 300 feet thick at the head.

© Steve Sallis



Grinnell Glacier

By 2030 all of this will be gone.



The trail to Grinnell Glacier

At times the trail is cut through rock. This section preserves the ripples from a fossilized sea floor.

© Steve Salls

Grinnell Falls

Another amazing view from my favorite trail.

© Steve Salis





Grinnell Glacier 1997

Salamander Glacier is in the foreground with Grinnell Glacier at the upper right. The glacier has receded a few hundred feet since this photo was taken. Grinnell Lake didn't appear until the 1920s.

© Steve Salis



Lower Grinnell Lake

The hike to Grinnell Glacier is a visual feast.



The Red Rock zone

This is bear country. The trees and scrub often hide bears feeding on the abundant Huckleberries. Smart hikers make noise before rounding this bend to avoid surprising a Grizzly.

© Steve Salls



A Nice Picnic Spot

Lower Grinnell Lake

© Steve Sallis

Hiking the glacier

Until 1999 Rangers led hikes on Grinnell Glacier, since then rapid melting made glacier travel unsafe. A man died by falling into a crevasse in 2005.

© Steve Salis



Crossing the Falls

The melt water is crossed by jumping over a rock bridge. Eventually this melt water flows into the Gulf of Mexico.

© Steve Salis



Big Horn

Big Horn Sheep frequent this protected area.

© Steve Salis



Stromatolytes

This fossilized algae was revealed when the glacier receded. It's proof that the sediment that makes up Glacier's mountains was once at the bottom of a sea.

© Steve Salis





Going to the Sun Road near Logan Pass

Wild flowers in late summer

© Steve Salls



Lunch Creek

The Going to the Sun Road winds its way past Lunch Creek to Logan Pass. Mt. Reynolds dominates this view.

© Steve Sallis

The East Tunnel

The Going to the Sun Road cuts through the mountains on the east side of Logan Pass.

© Steve Salis



Going to the Sun Road Falls

In the spring and early summer, snow melt creates falls along the alpine section.

© Steve Salis






Mt. Reynolds

The sharp edges of each side of Mt. Reynolds were carved by glaciers, proof that at one time thousands of feet of ice filled this valley. The Glaciers began to recede 10,000 years ago.

© Steve Sallis



Jackson Glacier

This viewpoint marks the beginning of the alpine section of the Going to the Sun Road. Jackson is the largest glacier in the park. It is shrinking and will be gone by 2030.

© Steve Salis



Temporary Falls

When it rains the walls pour.

© Steve Sallis

Bear Family

Black bears, like these, come in many colors. They are more common than the far more dangerous Grizzly.

© Steve Salis



Porcupine

Once numerous in the park, this sighting near the Swiftcurrent Motor Inn is rare. This one and another were attempting to procreate under my cabin.

© Steve Salis



Logan Pass Big Horn

Big Horn gather at Logan Pass in the morning. They return in the late afternoon where they lick the antifreeze that boils over from cars that struggle over the 6,600 foot pass.

© Steve Salis





Big Horn are the Symbol of Glacier

Big Horn are common above 6,000 feet.
They are remarkably calm around humans.

© Steve Salls

Deer

This deer was wandering through the Kintla Lake campground in the northwest corner of the park.

© Steve Salis



Mountain Goats

At times they seem to pose at Logan Pass.

© Steve Salis





St. Mary's Lake

Sunrise on a windy morning

© Steve Salis



Cedar Forest

Near the Trail of the Cedars

© Steve Sallis



Trail of the Cedars

One of the most popular trails in the park is the Trail of the Cedars near the west entrance. A boardwalk weaves its way through an old growth temperate rain forest.

© Steve Salls

Fallen Cedar

Undergrowth and large trees in the Trail of the Cedars.

© Steve Salis



Mushrooms

Sometimes the interesting subject matter is right at your feet.

© Steve Salis



Avalanche Gorge

The Trail of the Cedars is a short wheelchair accessible loop through an old growth cedar forest. It leads to Avalanche Creek and its spectacular gorge.

© Steve Salis



Flowing Creek

© Steve Salis



The Water of Lake McDonald

Multicolored rock is evidence of the variety of geology in the park.

© Steve Salis



Cloud Hearts

Proof that someone up there loves the mountains.

© Steve Salis



Chief Mountain

It got its name when a Native American Chief climbed it hundreds of years ago. Climbers in the 20th century found a buffalo skull carried up the peak by the chief.

© Steve Salis





Hidden Falls

When you take a wrong turn on the Grinnell Trail you'll find this surprise.



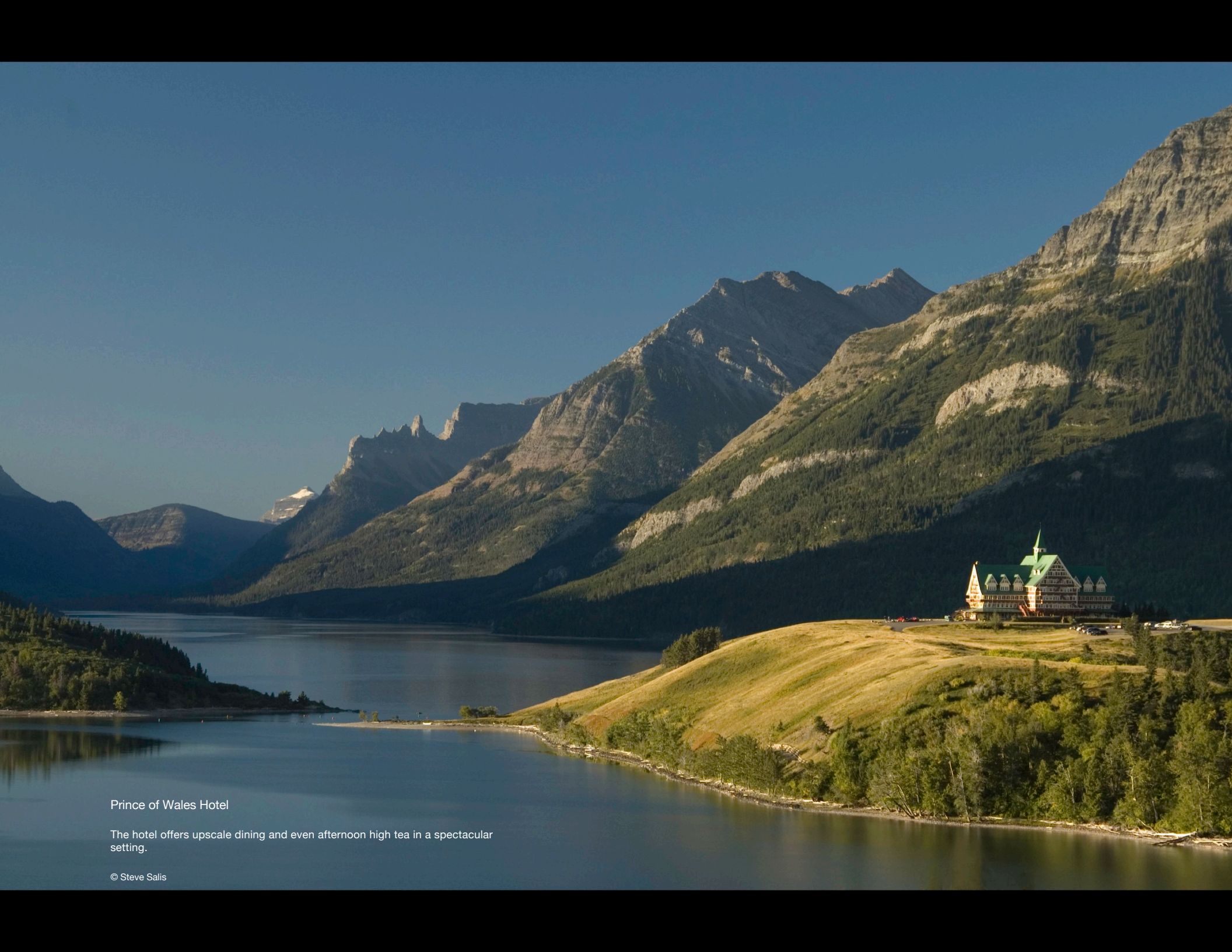
Fly Fishing on Bullhead Lake

You have to hike four miles to reach these fishing grounds.

© Steve Sallis



Mt. Gould



Prince of Wales Hotel

The hotel offers upscale dining and even afternoon high tea in a spectacular setting.

© Steve Salis

Waterton Lake

Waterton National Park, across the border in Alberta, shares its southern border with Glacier. Together the parks make up the world's first International Peace Park.

© Steve Salis



Lake Cameron

One of the lakes in Waterton National Park.

© Steve Salis



Double falls

© Steve Salis





Baring Falls

A short hike from the Going to the Sun Road leads to one of the most accessible falls in the park.

© Steve Salls



Forest Fire Smoke over McDonald Creek

A few days after this image was taken in 2003, the park was closed due to the growing fire. Eventually, 136,000 acres burned. Fires are rarely fought in national parks to protect the long term health of their forests.

© Steve Salis



Fire Burns Near the Loop in 2003

Interpretive signs dot the Going to the Sun Road. This one explains the important role of fire as one burns the valley below.

© Steve Salis



The Loop Trailhead in 2008

By 2008, seedlings were growing and the forest was showing signs of recovery.

© Steve Salis

Clouds Below the Going to the Sun Road

Clouds often collect in the valley west of Logan Pass.

© Steve Salis



Confused Lodge Pole Pine

Sometimes even trees don't know which way is up.

© Steve Salis





Two Medicine Lake

Hiking down from Scenic Point on the 3.1 mile trail that climbs 2,350 feet, while providing views of Two Medicine Lake.

© Steve Sallis



The Footbridge

Mt. Gould dominates the Many Glacier area

© Steve Sallis



Glacier Carved Mountains

© Steve Salls 2009



Piegan Pass Trail

An odd vertigo like feeling occurs when hiking on a long treeless skree slope because of the lack of reference points. Consequently, and ironically, I spent most of my time looking at my feet, pausing occasionally to take in the view.

© Steve Salls





Piegan Pass

This valley was once filled with ice. The small turquoise lake gets its color from glacier flour which is made of small particles scraped from rock by a long gone moving glacier.

© Steve Salis



South on Highway 89 toward town of St. Mary's

Snow can fall any week of the year in Glacier.

© Steve Salis

Gunsite Pass Trail

One of the few views on Gunsite Pass Trail not hidden by trees.

© Steve Salis



Beetle Blight

Fire isn't the only thing destroying forests. Many conifers in the park are dying due to an infestation of boring beetles. Lack of rain and snow has allowed the pests to flourish.

© Steve Salis





Beargrass at Lunch Creek

Beargrass blooms in mid to late summer. It will be several years before these plants are able to bloom again.

© Steve Salis



Swiftcurrent Valley

This view is why I've hiked the 15.2 mile Highline Trail twice. The trail ends below the 4th lake in the chain more than 6 miles from here.

© Steve Salis



Lower Grinnell Lake with Lupins

I've walked past this spot over 20 times.
Only once were the flowers in bloom.

© Steve Salis



Two Dog Flats

Prairie meets this ice carved mountain. Elk and other wildlife frequently traverse this flat as they head to St. Mary's Lake each morning.

© Steve Salis



The Garden Wall

As seen from Logan Pass looking northeast. The
Going to the Sun Road follows the Garden Wall west.
The Highline Trail is cut into its face.

© Steve Salis



Clouds Meet the Peaks

© Steve Salis





Bear Scat

When hiking in bear country, it's important to know your scat.

© Steve Salis



Appikenny Mountain

Thousands of years ago ice filled the valley and shaved off half of the mountain. Another glacier filled the valley between these two ridges.

© Steve Salis

Lake McDonald

At ten miles long this is the largest lake in the park.

© Steve Salis





August Snow

A 70 degree day can quickly turn to a winter wonderland in the mountains. The smart hiker is prepared for just about anything.

© Steve Salis

Snow on the Going to the Sun Road

The day before this photo was taken the temperature was in the 60s.

© Steve Salis



Snow on Piegan Pass

Hikers on the valley floor (5,100 ft) are comfortable in short sleeves while fresh snow carpets a pass at 8,000 ft.

© Steve Salis





Swiftcurrent Falls

Swiftcurrent Lake drains, spectacularly, just behind the Many Glacier Hotel.

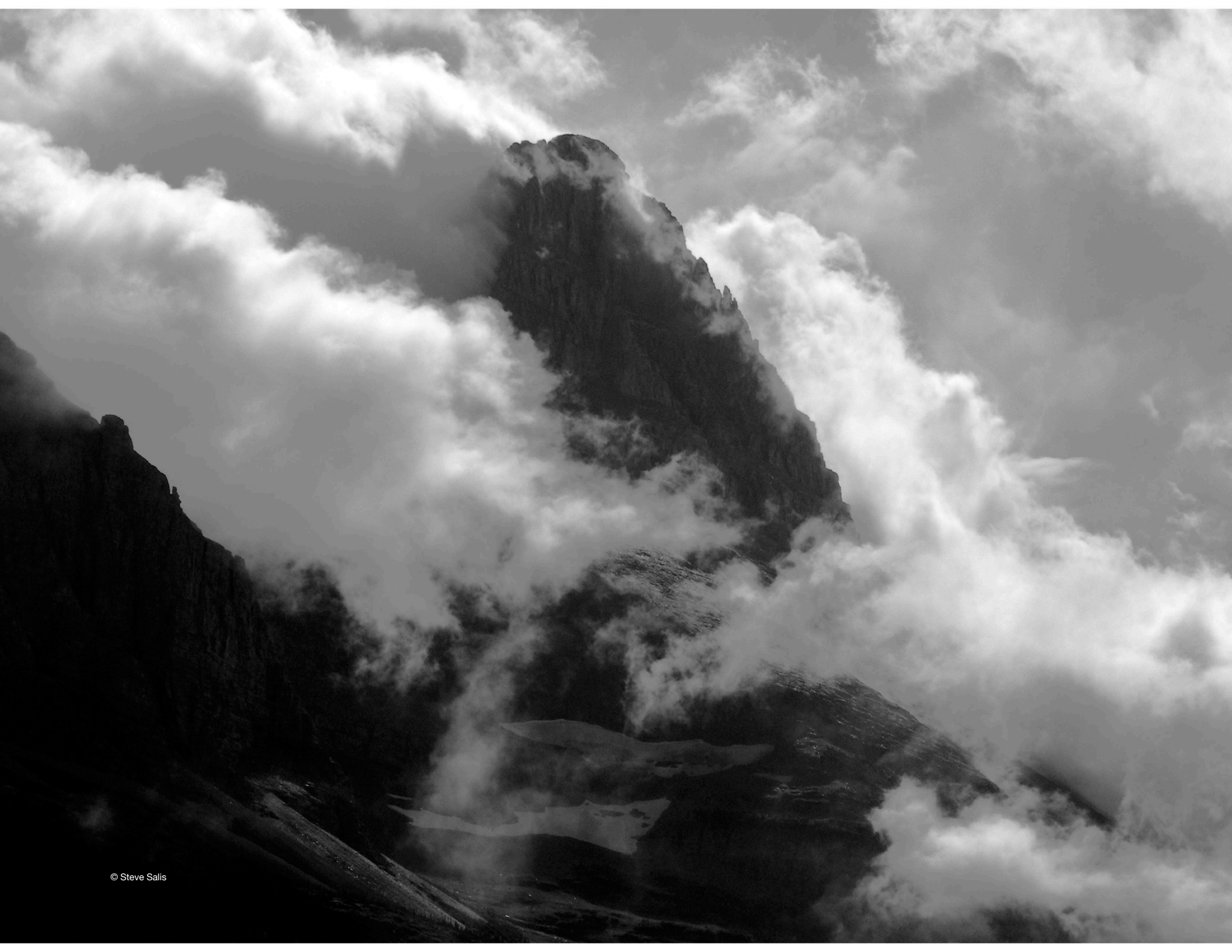
© Steve Salis

Grinnell Glacier Overlook

This is your reward after several miles of hiking.

© Steve Salis





© Steve Salis



Rapids

Fast water in the creek below Barring Falls

© Steve Salis





Glacier fed lake

Contact

Steve Salis

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Salamander Falls

Soon this view will be gone.

© Steve Salis





Bullhead Lake from the Highline Trail

This is one of my favorite views. The trail follows the chain of lakes before ending after the last one seen here at the Swiftcurrent Motor Inn.

© Steve Sallis



Final Words

My favorite national park is not easy to get to. It attracts the more intrepid traveler who is looking for a more rustic outdoor adventure. Most visitors only see the park by driving the magnificent 52 mile Going to the Sun Road.

To fully experience Glacier you must explore it on foot.

Most of the scenes captured in this volume can only be seen by hiking the backcountry.

One of my goals is to inspire others to see these sites for themselves. The glaciers are melting. They will be gone by the year 2030, with unknown consequences. Go see them while you still can.



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