Through The Lens

A guide to digital photography for computer enthusiasts.
After the click of your camera, you're only half done!

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Tips for Winter Photography

by Lynda Buske

This year in Ottawa we had an early dump of snow on November 9th and while this got some people thinking about Christmas shopping, it got me thinking about fun winter photography! Early winter is actually a good time to take snowy pictures since often temperatures hover around zero and the snow sticks to deciduous trees a little longer whereas in the dry, cold winter months it tends not to. It is still wise to get out early as even sticky snow will melt in the sun or blow off as breezes pick up during the day.

I wrote an article on winter photography in December of 2023 that you may wish to refer to as it covers camera gear and clothing recommendations.
https://opcug.ca/Photography/WinterPhotography.pdf

When shooting a snowy scene, the most important element that your camera needs to understand is the snow itself. Unless you have a snow scene mode on your camera, it will assume that this is a bright area that you will want to darken down a bit. To tell it that you do indeed want all this white stuff to look quite bright in your photo, set your exposure value (EV) to perhaps +1. It may be a physical button or a menu option you see on the screen.

If, however, a large portion of your image contains other objects such as a building, group of trees, people, etc. your camera will want to give adequate light to those areas and that might cause your snow to be over exposed or indeed "blasted out" with no detail. To prevent this, set the EV adust to -1. This may cause your main objects to be slightly darker than you wish but that can be adjusted in photo editing software. You can lighten shadows or isolate the main objects through a selection or masking function and then lighten it. In the free Photoscape X program that I use, click on *Colour*, then *Mask*. Paint the area you wish to lighten and then drag the *Brighten* bar to the desired exposure.

A great tool to check if your image has overexposed areas of pure white and no detail is included in Windows PowerToys. No matter where you are viewing the photo (eg. in a photo viewer such as Irfanview or in Windows Photos or other editing software such as Lightroom or Photoscape X), you can easily check the RGB values of any pixels in your image. To activate this tool, first install the free Microsoft PowerToys from the Microsoft store. Then press the ***Windows, Shift,* and *C* keys** holding them all down together. A rectangular box will appear and you can drag it around your image and see the exact Red/Green/Blue values.

With this tool, pure black will appear as is 0,0,0 and pure white will be 255,255, 255. Note in Figure 1, the RGB values of this grey area of the image are between 0 or 255. However, in Figure 2, there is a small area of pure white (i.e. 255,255,255). This doesn't necessarily make for a bad image (especially if the area is small). It may be very difficult to darken the area and even if you can, it may result in a muddy grey with no texture. In this example there are no areas of pure black (0,0,0) but if there were, the same principals would apply.

Figure 1

Figure 2

An alternative method of adjusting your image to ensure no areas have pure white, is using a c*urves adjustment*, if available in your software, in order is to modify the tone curve by dragging the top right (pure white) down slightly so anything that is pure white is changed to a very light grey. In Photoscape X Pro ($60), go to *Adjustments/Curves.* See Figure 3 and Figure 4. Note that you have the option to apply a mask to a particular area. I'm not suggesting that Figure 4 is a better image; it's strictly to demonstrate the effect of the colour curve adjustment.

Figure 3: Original

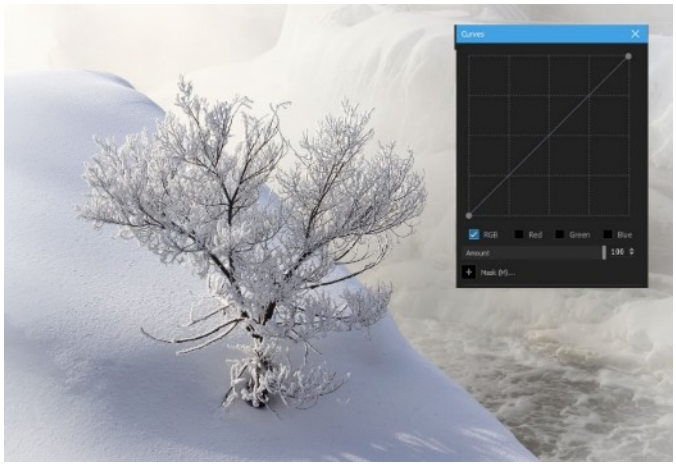
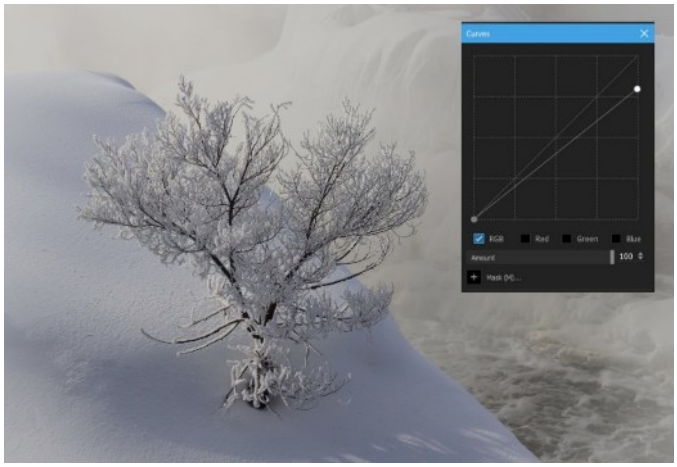


Figure 4: Adjusted by curves



See all OPCUG articles on digital photography at https://opcug.ca/digital-photography/.