

Dover Stone Church, in Dover Plains, is a place I had always wanted to go see, but with all the work I had been doing in the Adirondacks and Finger Lakes, it had to wait... until this year!

We had taken a trip there in January and arrived to an icy trail and a light rain that had moved in. Both of these, while nothing that would be a deterrent, made the short hike in a little unpleasant. The swollen creek flowed under the ice that was the trail, making us take very careful footsteps, wonder why we were there. We were able to get to within ten yards of the cave entrance, but I was not willing to take the chance for a photo. I was already soaked from the rain and didn't feel like taking a ride in the freezing water.

Our second visit came March 7th, a much nicer day! No rain, a little snow on the trail, and a much calmer creek gave me hope that I'd get the shot I was thinking of.

We hiked in to the kiosk where we stopped to put on our Hillsound trail crampons to get us safely over the ice, and I put on my GoPro Hero 5 to record the hike. While the ice was not nearly as bad this time, there was still quite a bit that wouldn't be wise to navigate without traction devices. The creek was flowing nicely, and the freshly-fallen snow on the trees and rocks made for a scene straight out of a movie.

We easily made our way up along the creek, stopping for photos every now and then. While grabbing a couple photos of a smaller waterfall, I heard a loud crack and turned to see a branch falling from a tree a short distance away. Fortunately that was the only one!

As I approached the cave entrance, I could see ice hanging on the right with the waterfall in the center. Looking up, I could see daylight through the opening in the rock above. Water rushed past me, tumbling over rocks and ice before exiting the cave. Inside, I could see a light blue hue tinted sections of the ice that had formed on the cave wall.

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I poked through the icy water to find footing that would allow me to enter the cave. There were a few rocks that weren't too deep, so I planted my trekking pole and took a step of faith. From there, I hopped over two more rocks and found my spot. The cave was more impressive up-close. I could really see the blue in the ice which was illuminated by the sunlight that shown through the opening above. The waterfall was fully visible now as it poured out of the opening in the back-lit rock, and large icicles could now be seen hanging

from the roof and sides of the cave. It was quite a sight to see in person!

Due to the complexity of the lighting, I set my camera to bracket three shots at 1 stop difference up and down. At first, I did handheld shots, but then set up the tripod the best I could while balancing on a couple of rocks. While I usually like to make exposures with a shutter speed of 1/8 to show motion while still blurring the water, for this one I wanted to slow it way down. I set my aperture to the smallest setting, and dialed over to a shutter speed of 2 second to start with. The internal meter was giving a different reading, but I was looking to capture the mood of the scene I was looking at which needed a different setting under manual.

I made the first exposures and checked to see how my settings were working. I was happy with what I saw and proceeded to capture different angles inside the cave. To reduce the chance for vibration, I dialed back the shutter speed. (You don't need a two minute exposure to get the silky look on the water!) The photo wasn't about just the waterfall. I wanted to capture the entire scene I saw and place viewers there. In my composition, I placed the waterfall off-center to the left, with the ice and exiting water on the right.

I knew I would need to do more post-processing than I normally do due to that tricky light, but not too much. I got the RAW file into Lightroom and went to work. My favorite tool to use the adjustment brush as much as possible so I can focus on individual areas rather than the entire photo. I ended up reducing the exposure a bit and then using the adjustment brush to raise the exposure in a couple spots to recreate what I actually saw versus the RAW image. A little saturation, sharpness, and contrast and we have the final image.

Camera settings:

Nikon D750

Aperture: f/25

Shutter speed: 1/2 sec.

ISO: 400

Exposure bias: -1 step

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