

Robert Cameron, 95, Makes Life Career of Showing the World Through Aerial Photographs

By Leslie Rott

At the age of 95, Robert Cameron is still doing what he loves, taking aerial photographs around the world. Visiting his daughter and son-in-law, Mackinac Island West Bluff cottagers Jane and Richard Manoogian, every summer for the past 15 years, Mr. Cameron has gained a love and appreciation for Mackinac Island, as well.

To emphasize that, he donated one of his photographs to the Medical Center Auction on August 27.

On Mackinac Island, Mr. Cameron said, "They try to give you the feeling of 100 years ago, and I get it."

A photographer with a natural eye for composition, Mr. Cameron nevertheless admits, "The camera always sees more than I do."

In a digital age, all of his aerial photographs are taken with film, and he has published 22 aerial photographic studies from around the world, with more than three million in print, including "Above Mackinac Island," published in 1994. He published his first "Above" book, "Above San Francisco," in 1969 (he has since published three more around the city), and has chronicled areas from Alcatraz to London and Paris.

He has some interesting stories to tell about the places he has photographed.

While taking pictures of Mont Blanc in France, Mr. Cameron shot from 12,000 feet without the use of oxygen, and that, he said, proved to be a breath-taking experience. It took him 10 passes over the Washington Monument to get perfectly vertical shot, which appears in his "Above Washington" book.

His prefers the evening light, when long shadows add dimension to his landscape portraits, and he often composes his images to include the clouds and the sky.

Among his favorites is a photograph of the Statue of Liberty framed by the World Trade Center, images of the surf energized by El Niño, and the Golden Gate Bridge.

"I guess I like things that are good looking," he said of his choice of subjects.

He jokes that he has added the letters W.O.O.A.P. to his business card, initials for World's Oldest One-eyed Aerial Photographer. Or maybe he isn't joking. But despite declining eyesight, he still has his sense of humor.

And while his daughter says an operation may give him new vision, at his age, Mr. Cameron said he is more interested now in exhibiting his work than in publishing it.

His public exhibit this summer at Grand Hotel needs 600 feet of display space, and even at the Grand, where the front porch is 660 feet long, finding a place to



At left: Robert Cameron with an aerial photograph that he took of West Bluff cottages Cairngorm (left) and Hogg Haven on the West Bluff. He is in the living room of Hogg Haven, owned by his daughter and her husband, Jane and Richard Manoogian.

display everything was difficult.

His exhibit photographs are large, measured in feet instead of inches, and he enjoys observing people's reaction to them. The biggest compliment is when people say the size and clarity of the images make them feel as if they can walk directly into the photographs. Even at six feet tall, he is dwarfed by a photograph that can be 10 feet tall.

"People are interested in aerial photography and history, and that's what my books contain," he said of the public's reception of his work.

Mr. Cameron has met many

famous people, among them Ronald Reagan, Nat King Cole, and Louis Armstrong. The great photographer Ansel Adams, in whose darkroom Mr. Cameron has spent time, is one of his inspirations.

His hope is that in 100 years, people will look at his work as a representation of the way things were. And some will see his work much farther into the future than that, because his two most recent "Above San Francisco" books were put into a time capsule under the San Francisco City Hall and will be opened in 3000.

The large photographs at

Grand Hotel will be on exhibit through October and came directly from a showing at the Presidio in San Francisco, where they were held over twice and viewed

by 26,000 people from more than 39 counties. An environmental exhibit there in May will include aerial photographs from 100 years ago through the present and will include his works.

He is making arrangements to have his photographs exhibited in New York this fall.

Mr. Cameron has been taking photographs since he was 10 years old, and he began his career as a news photographer for the Des Moines Register.

Using a Pentax 6X7 cm camera and seven lenses, most of Mr. Cameron's photographs are taken from a helicopter.

Study of Cattails Finds Invasive Species Alter Habitat to Their Benefit

When scientists study habitats that alien species have invaded, they usually find predictable patterns. The diversity of native species declines, and changes occur in natural processes such as nutrient cycling, wildfire frequency, and the movement of water through the system.

But simply observing such changes doesn't prove that the invaders are responsible.

University of Michigan researchers Emily Farrer and Deborah Goldberg, however, came up with a way to tease out the cause of environmental changes in northern Michigan wetlands where invasive cattails have taken hold. The cattails, they found, alter the environment in ways that hinder native species but benefit the invaders. Ms. Farrer and Ms. Goldberg will share their results with the Ecological Society of America in Memphis, Tennessee.

"When you have an invasion, you typically see three things happening at once: the invasion, the change in environment, and the decrease in diversity," said Ms. Farrer, a graduate student in Ms. Goldberg's laboratory group. "But they're all happening concurrently, so you can't really tell which is causing the other." Other factors may enter in. For example, human activity, such as the use of fertilizers and road salt and the suppression of natural wildfires, also may result in environmental changes that affect species diversity.

"My question was, are humans causing the changes, or are the invaders?" Ms. Farrer said. "Finding the answer has practical implications. If you're trying to restore a natural habitat, you have to know the cause of the decline in native

species. Do you target the invader or try to minimize human interference?"

Ms. Farrer began by surveying marshes in northern Michigan to find out what kinds of cattails were there. The state is home to three cattail species, the native broad-leaf cattail, the invasive narrow-leaf cattail, which was introduced on the east coast in the early 19th century and eventually found its way inland, and a hybrid of the two species that is larger than either parent and tolerates a wider range of environmental conditions.

In the marshes she studied, Ms. Farrer found that hybrids were more common than native cattails. She also noted that the areas of each marsh with lots of hybrid cattails had higher nutrient levels and heavier mats of dead cattail stems than

areas with only native wetland plants. The plants growing in these invaded areas also were different, with fewer classic wetland species, such as bulrushes, rushes, and sedges, and more typical land plants like grasses, asters, and goldenrods.

Next, Ms. Farrer did transplant experiments to figure out whether

the invaders were causing the changes she observed. She set up four study plots in a previously uninvaded section of marsh. In one, she transplanted live hybrid cattails, in the second she added litter, the mats of dead stems that accumulate

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