



THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S GUIDE TO THE
GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE | BY ROB DWECK



Peachpit Press



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Rob Dweck

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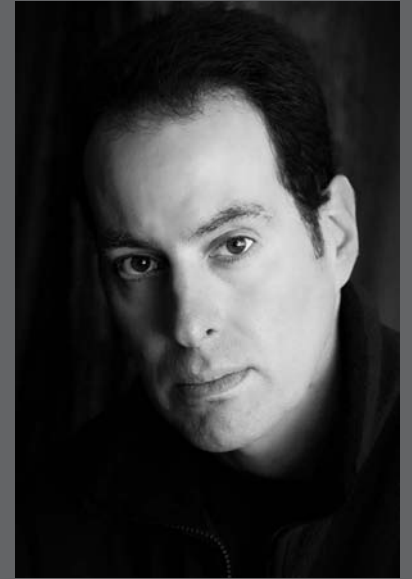
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About the Author

Rob Dweck is an award winning photographer whose photographs have appeared in books and magazines. After spending most of his life on the east coast, he fulfilled his dream of moving to California in 2000 and settled in the San Francisco Bay Area. Rob soon developed an interest in photography, which quickly became a passion and an ongoing fascination with light.



You can see more of his work at robdweck.com

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Introduction

If there's one landmark that symbolizes San Francisco in most people's minds, it's the Golden Gate Bridge. It is photographed thousands of times daily as the most popular site in an area that is full of world-class attractions such as Golden Gate Park, Muir Woods and Fisherman's Wharf. More than just a thoroughfare for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians traveling between San Francisco and Marin County, the bridge inspires amateur and professional photographers alike who want to create memorable images.

Most of these photographers are unaware of the multitude of locations and perspectives from which the bridge can be photographed. My intention with this book is to show you where, when and how to create great photographs of the bridge. Sure, you can pull up to one of the viewpoints, pull out your camera phone and take a quick snapshot of your family in front of the bridge for your photo album. If that's your goal, then this book

is probably not for you. However, if you're interested in making compelling photographs of the bridge, from the best vantage points, in the best light, then read on.

What you won't find in this book is a list of every single location that has a view of the bridge. There are so many places in and around San Francisco that offer glimpses of the bridge, that including all of them would be impractical and wouldn't assist you in getting the best possible photographs. I included only those locations that offer outstanding opportunities for you to create beautiful images.

GPS coordinates are included for most locations and clicking on the coordinates opens a map of the location. All web addresses shown in the book are links and will open the URL when clicked.

Angel Island, Treasure Island and East Bay

Although Angel Island is technically in Marin County, from a photographic perspective it has more in common with the locations described in this section. All of these locations lie east of the bridge and share a similar view. There are advantages and disadvantages at each of these locations—photographically, as well as in regards to transportation.

Angel Island is closest to the bridge and is an ideal place for a day trip or overnight camping trip, but you will need to get on a ferry or some other boat to get there. Treasure Island is an easy drive from San Francisco and offers great views of the San Francisco skyline, but has no outstanding foregrounds. The Berkeley Marina is furthest from the bridge, but has a unique foreground subject in the abandoned pier.

Of these locations, Angel Island offers the best and greatest variety of photo opportunities which I cover in depth. Treasure Island

and the East Bay are briefly included here for those who wish to explore those areas.

The entire western shore of Treasure Island has clear views of the bridge, although the background can be challenging. The southern portion of the bridge has a backdrop of the sky while the northern portion has the hills of the Marin Headlands as a background. This means that during colorful sunsets, the South tower will be silhouetted against a vibrant sky and the North tower will be barely visible. Use a focal length of 300mm or longer to isolate the South tower against a dramatic sky at sunset.

At certain times of the year, it is possible to photograph the full moon setting behind the bridge from Treasure Island. Timing is essential for this type of shot and can be calculated using The Photographer's Ephemeris or similar apps (<http://photoephemeris.com>).

Angel Island, Treasure Island and East Bay

The shores of the East Bay cities of Emeryville, Berkeley and Albany are nearly 10 miles from the bridge, which presents several challenges. Clear weather is essential, as is a good telephoto lens. The bigger challenge is getting both the foreground and the bridge in focus so you'll want to use a very small aperture.

N37 51.576
W122 19.619

When it comes to foregrounds, the most interesting one is the abandoned pier at the Berkeley Marina. Getting there requires walking down the lengthy municipal pier at the end of University Avenue.

As you walk down the pier, it may seem like the end isn't getting any closer, but eventually you'll arrive. The first thing you'll notice is the barrier that requires a tall ladder to shoot over the obstructed view. If you didn't bring one with you, that means you will need to shoot through the openings between the posts. Since long focal lengths are a given at

this distance, that won't present too much of a problem.

The bigger issue will be exposing for the bridge and foreground. Since the best time to shoot from this location is at sunset when the bridge is silhouetted against the bright and vibrant sky, the abandoned pier in front of you will be lost in the shadows. If you don't have a graduated neutral density filter then you'll need to get two exposures, one for the highlights and another for the shadows, and combine them in post processing.

Angel Island, Treasure Island and East Bay

Angel Island

Getting there

There are no bridges to Angel Island so getting there involves going on the water. The easiest and most popular way is via the ferries that depart from San Francisco and Tiburon, although you can also get there by private boat or kayak. Ferry schedules vary by time of year with reduced service from October through May. State park day use fees are included in the fare.

N37 48.553
W122 24.729

Blue & Gold Fleet operates ferries from pier 41 in San Francisco. The one-way trip is approximately 20 minutes. Schedule and fare information can be found on their website at <http://blueandgoldfleet.com/ferry-services/ferry-schedules/#932>. The Angel Island Tiburon Ferry departs from downtown Tiburon and the one-way trip is approximately 15 minutes. Schedule and fare information can be found on their website at <http://www.angelislandferry.com/FerryServices/Schedule.aspx>.

N37 52.364
W122 27.367

A limited number of boat slips are available in Ayala Cove on a first-come, first-served basis for those with private boats. If you are an experienced kayaker, Sea Trek in Sausalito rents kayaks, however currents in Raccoon Strait can be strong and the crossing is not recommended for inexperienced kayakers.

N37 52.075
W122 26.074

To photograph the bridge at sunrise or sunset from Angel Island, you will need to spend one or more nights on the island. The only overnight accommodations are the 11 campsites located around the island. The unique experience of camping on Angel Island has advantages and disadvantages for photographers. During peak summer months, campsites must be reserved well in advance. Summer means lots of fog, and by booking a campsite months in advance you gamble that the weather will be in your favor.

For this reason, I recommend going in the shoulder seasons: April, May, September and October. By going at this time you increase

Angel Island, Treasure Island and East Bay

your chance of getting clear weather and there is a higher probability that campsites will be available on a walk-in basis on weekdays. If you have the flexibility of waiting until the last minute, you can check the weather forecast in the morning and phone the Angel Island Ranger Station (415-435-5390) to find out if campsites are available for the same day.

The campsites closest to the best bridge photography locations are the Ridge sites (4, 5 and 6), the ADA site (10) and Kayak group camp (11). The other campsites are on the east side of the island and require a longer walk to most of the bridge viewpoints.

If camping is not an option, a long day trip is your next best bet. There is so much to see and photograph on Angel Island and a full day excursion affords the opportunity to enjoy it at a relaxed pace.

The three top locations to photograph the bridge are Camp Reynolds, Battery Ledyard

and Mount Livermore. What follows is a walking route that includes these locations as well as an optional fourth location. The full loop is over 5 miles with 800+ feet of elevation gain so allow plenty of time and bring water, snacks, sunscreen and any other items you need for a hike of this length. If time doesn't permit you to complete the entire loop, you can go as far as Battery Ledyard and return to Ayala Cove via the Perimeter Road.

From the dock at Ayala Cove, walk the paved road past the picnic area and up to the Perimeter Road. Turn right on Perimeter Road and follow the road until you see the large red brick building at Camp Reynolds. Follow the signs to the right and walk towards the ADA campsite, continuing on the narrow trail that goes up to the left of the site. Follow this trail through the trees until you reach the opening at Point Stewart. Here you will get your first view of the bridge.

The foreground is not particularly photogenic, but you may find the distant view of the

N37 51.659
W122 26.677

Angel Island, Treasure Island and East Bay

bridge worth stopping for. Continue on the trail to where it meets a dirt road. Follow this road as it leads through a eucalyptus grove to the main gravel road at Camp Reynolds. Turn right on this road and follow it down to the beach where you'll see the old pilings at the beach.

N37 51.588
W122 26.620

These pilings make a great foreground for a bridge photograph. Shooting from the beach area will require a fairly wide focal length to include the pilings and the bridge, but don't restrict yourself to just the beach. Go up to the eucalyptus grove above the beach near the large aloe plants. From this vantage point you can include the pilings and the bridge with a focal length of 70mm or even higher.

N37 51.402
W122 26.469

When you are done shooting from here, follow the gravel road back up the hill where it curves to the right and goes past the small chapel to the right. This road soon meets the Perimeter Road where you will continue straight to the benches above Battery Ledyard. Here you will get unobstructed views of

the bridge. At sunset, use extreme telephoto focal lengths to photograph the bridge silhouetted against an orange sky. This is also a great spot for a panorama of the entire span.

Continue on the Perimeter Road along the south side of the island to the turnoff for Battery Drew. During spring months this can be a worthwhile diversion when the pride of madeira flowers are in bloom on the roof of the battery. If this is not of interest to you, continue on the Perimeter Road.

Walk up the road towards Battery Drew and walk around the structure where you'll see a ladder going up to the roof. Climb the ladder and continue up the steep, narrow trail to the roof. Caution: This trail is extremely steep and slippery and a fall here could lead to serious injury. Climb at your own risk.

N37 51.321
W122 26.068

When you get to the top turn around to see the pride of madeira in the foreground and

Angel Island, Treasure Island and East Bay

the bridge off in the distance. The trickiest part of including these blue-purple flowers in the frame with the bridge is focusing. Even at small apertures, it will be difficult to have the foreground and the bridge in focus. For the best results, use a tripod and do several exposures, each one focused at different distances. Those exposures can then be stacked in post processing to create one image with everything in focus.

After carefully making your way down from Battery Drew, continue on the road in the same direction until it joins the Perimeter Road.

N37 51.699
W122 25.867

Continue walking east (away from the bridge) along the Perimeter Road until you reach the intersection with the fire road. Turn left onto the road and follow the signs to the top of Mount Livermore. At the end of the trail you'll arrive at a picnic area with one of the best views on the bay.

Allow a little time to catch your breath, take in the view and enjoy your surroundings before taking out your camera. When you're ready to shoot, experiment with wide focal lengths to include the western side of the island as your foreground. Then go for extreme telephoto shots at 400mm or greater to isolate sections of the bridge or do a panorama. When there is low fog, the top of Mount Livermore and the towers of the bridge will often peek out above the fog line. From here you can create a photo of a vast sea of fog with the bridge rising in the distance.

After you get your fill of the view from the top of the mountain, retrace your steps and follow the trail back down until you get to the signed intersection with the sunset trail. Follow the sunset trail all the way back to Ayala Cove, or if time permits, walk back down to Perimeter Road and turn left to complete the loop around the island on the road.



Angel Island: A 30 second exposure smooths the waters of the San Francisco Bay. Canon 5D mark II, Canon 24-105mm f/4L, 30 sec, f/18, ISO 100, 82mm, B+W 10-stop neutral density filter