

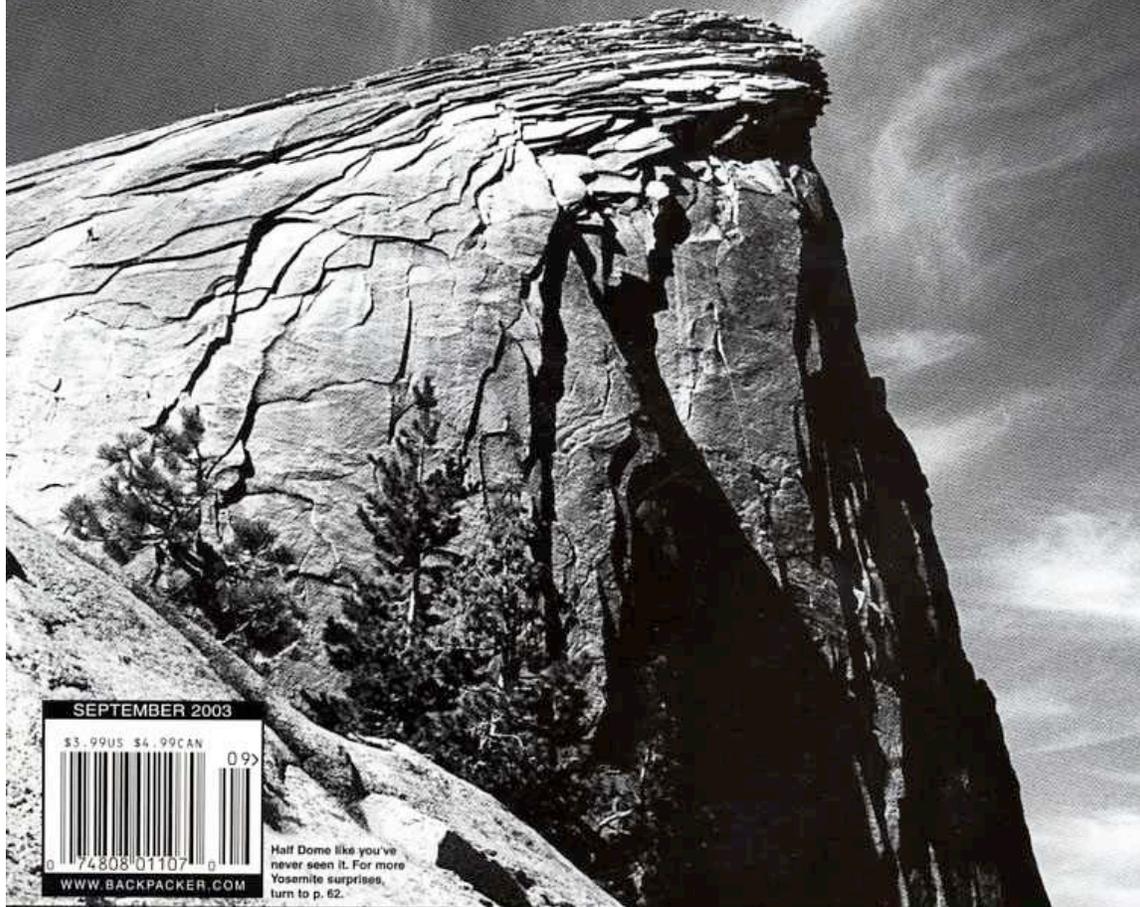
WHERE YOU CAN HEAR THE WOLVES HOWL, p. 30

# BACKPACKER

The Magazine Of Wilderness Travel

## Secrets of Yosemite

SPECIAL GUIDE AND MAP TO NATIONAL PARK SOLITUDE



SEPTEMBER 2003

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Half Dome like you've never seen it. For more Yosemite surprises, turn to p. 62.

HOW TO CUT YOUR ARM OFF, P. 58 • WIN NEW THREADS, P.17

# Light Camera, Action

3 TRAILWORTHY  
DIGITAL CAMERAS PLUS  
4 DO-IT-ALL SHOES

Your grandma uses a digital camera. So does your kid. Why should you get one? Instant gratification: The moment you arrive home, you can e-mail a glory shot of summit day to your buddy who bailed on the trip. And a lighter load: Snap an album's worth of quality pics without lugging heavy lenses and a bag full of film. But before you blow a buck on a bunch of megapixels, make sure you pick a trailworthy model. Most are impractical for treks longer than a few days, because they run only on short-lived rechargeable batteries.

Last spring in the Rockies, I tested three digital cameras that use both off-the-shelf batteries for extended field time and rechargeables. Each model offers more sophistication (zoom, close-ups within a couple inches, movies, manual controls) than beginner point-and-shoots. Prices quoted are street averages. Spend another \$50 for a 128 MB card; on a long hike, you may want several. The reviews follow in order of ascending price.

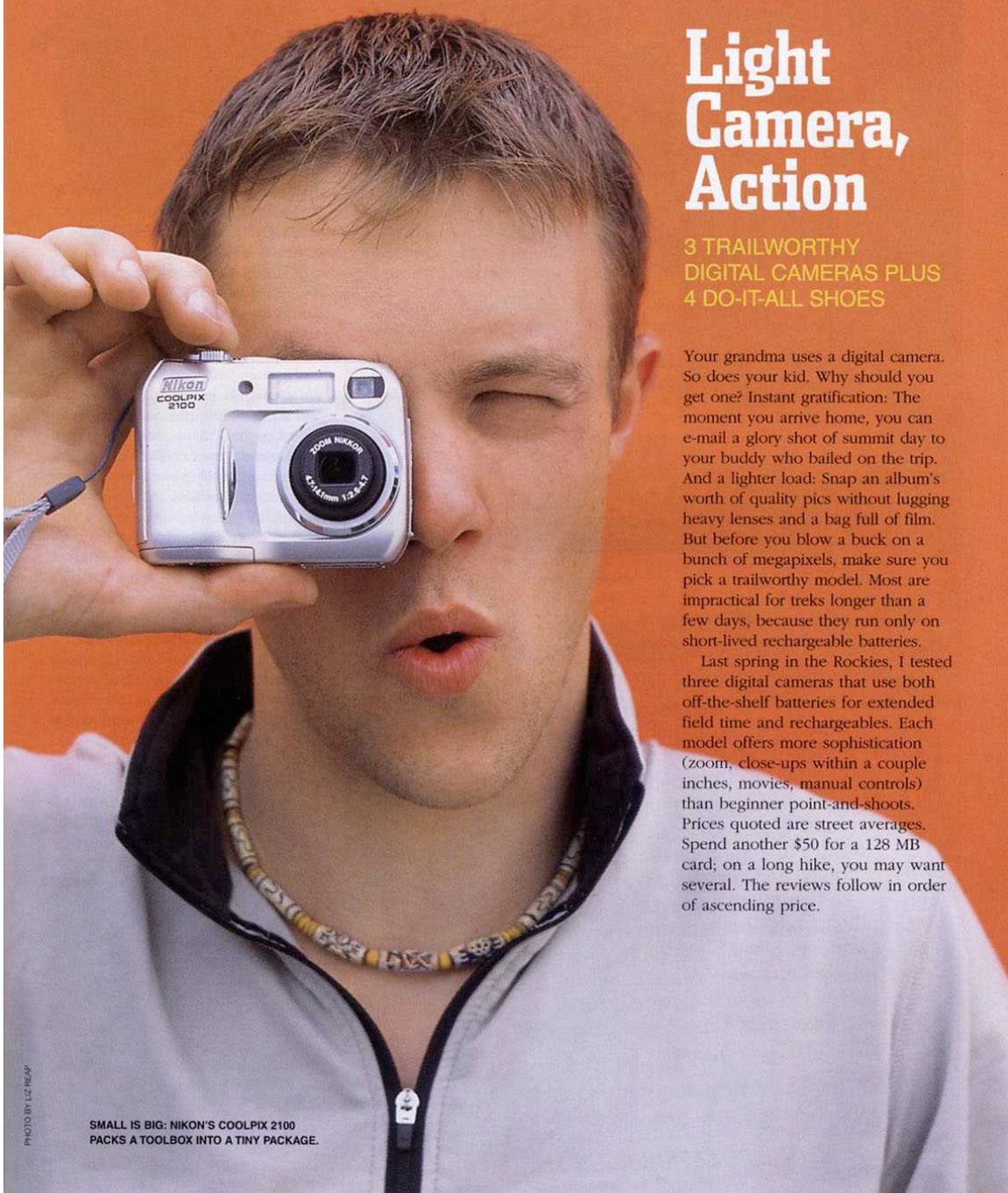


PHOTO BY IZ HEAP

SMALL IS BIG: NIKON'S COOLPIX 2100  
PACKS A TOOLBOX INTO A TINY PACKAGE.



**Nikon Coolpix 2100**  
**\$250 • 2 megapixels • 7 oz.**  
 THE LIGHTEST FULL-FEATURED  
 CAMERA WE'VE SEEN

If Ansel Adams had been born in the digital age, this 7-ounce wonder would have made him a believer. The compact (3.4 x 2.6 x 1.5 inches) number slips easily into a cargo pocket, yet has enough bells and whistles to thrill an expert, including black-and-white and sepia modes, plus image cropping right on the LCD screen. For point-and-shooters, the Coolpix features four assist modes to help you compose professional images and 10 scene modes to simplify tricky lighting.

Despite its diminutive size, the camera has surprisingly large controls, making it easy to operate even with my big, gloved hands on a backcountry ski trip. It's not the best choice for aspiring movie-makers (no sound, 15-second limit), and the lightweight plastic body doesn't inspire the drop-me-anywhere confidence of the metal models. The 2 megapixel resolution is fine for passable 8-by-10-inch prints and personal Web sites, but for finer resolution or increased cropping flexibility, get the Coolpix 3100, which is identical but has an extra megapixel for \$100 more. Uses two AA batteries.

Contact: (800) 645-6687; [www.nikonusa.com](http://www.nikonusa.com). *Reader service #107.*

**Canon PowerShot A70**  
**\$350 • 3.2 megapixels • 11 oz.**  
 UPGRADE YOUR CAMERA WITHOUT  
 SINKING YOUR CREDIT RATING.

Don't wrap your palm around this solid bundle of electronics until you're ready to buy. You may not want to let go. It's small enough to operate one-handed, yet packs a big dollop of digital bravado into its 11 ounces. Beneath the aluminum alloy body, which survived a 4-foot drop onto a rock unscathed, you'll find



photographer-friendly features like a focus assist light, sepia tones, contrast/color enhancer, and soft focus. The PowerShot is a little larger than the Coolpix, but one reason is the extra batteries (four AAs instead of two), which means that you get more than twice as many shots per battery change. And for would-be directors, this little powerhouse can shoot movies with sound up to 3 minutes. The 3.2 megapixels strike a nice balance between quality reproduction and cost, but if 2 megapixels will suffice, save \$100 and choose the A60.

Contact: (800) 828-4040; [www.usa.canon.com](http://www.usa.canon.com). *Reader service #108.*

**Olympus C-5050**  
**\$800 • 5 megapixels • 1 lb. 1 oz.**  
 THE FASTEST, SHARPEST DIGITAL  
 ON THE TRAIL

Which comes first, the pictures or the hike? If you're not sure, you're ready for the C-5050. It's pricier and heavier than the other two, but you get a lot in return: A magnesium body



offers superb handling and toughness, 5 megapixels deliver excellent reproduction, and the camera has every function a photo hound could want. First and foremost is a fast lens (F1.8-2.6). It adds bulk, but performs superbly in low light conditions and allows better portraits. Other standout features include a tilting LCD panel, remote control, hot shoe for full flash options, and movies with sound. Plus you get all the standard fare: focus assist light, custom cropping, image effects, and more. The C-5050 uses four AA batteries, and it accepts most storage formats, including the tiny new xD cards and 1 GB microdrives. One caveat: The power switch occasionally turned on by accident.

Contact: (888) 553-4448; [www.olympusamerica.com](http://www.olympusamerica.com). *Reader service #109.*

*Clyde Soles*

*NOTE: Weights are according to BACKPACKER scales, and include batteries, memory card, wrist strap, and lens cap.*

## Digital 101

A beginner's guide to high-tech photography

### What's a megapixel?

A million tiny dots. Literally. Pixels are the building blocks of a digital image, and they're measured in millions (mega). More dots means higher image resolution, which means better quality for enlarged prints. 2 is cousin Artie, 5 is uncle Ansel.

### How can I turn my digital photos into prints?

Cameras typically come with software that let you print at home. Or, for better quality and easy sharing, try an online service. Download photos, order prints, and store albums on the Web at [www.snapfish.com](http://www.snapfish.com); [www.shutterfly.com](http://www.shutterfly.com); [www.ofoto.com](http://www.ofoto.com).

### How many memory cards do I need?

One to two should suffice for a scenic week in the Rockies. A typical 128 MB card will hold approximately 110 to 790 images, depending on the resolution.

PHOTOS BY MATTHEW J. REIGNER