Photo taken 11-26-2021 at Comache Trail Park in Odessa, TX
Photographer Malcolm McElvaney

This wasn't as extraordinary as it appears but in its ordinary state the leaves on the one tree did stand out as they added some color. I think it also illustrates that an image has a hidden potential and can create a surprise if you work with it.

The photograph started in field as a bracketed set underexposed and overexposed by two stops either way. I ended up using the overexposed image as my base image and use the other two to modify it.
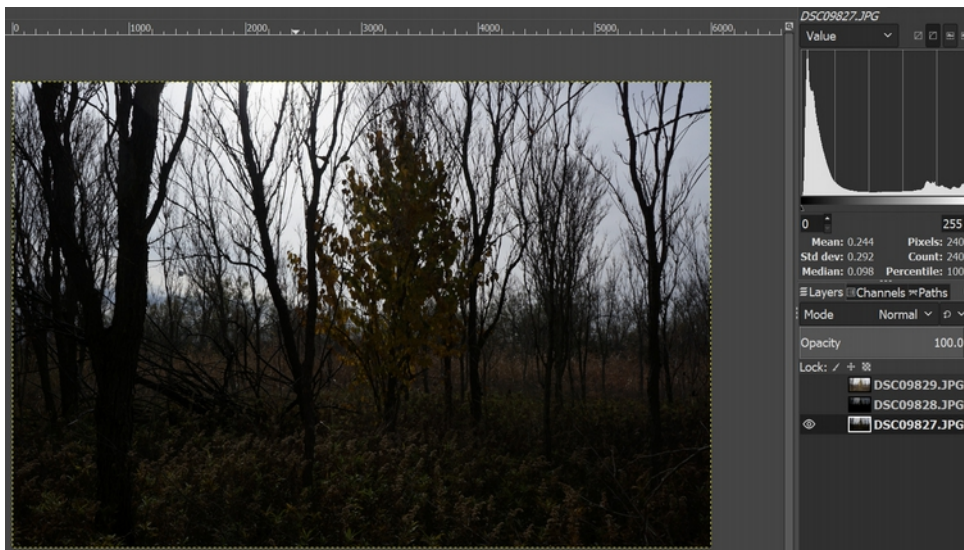
This was my neutral image and taken at 1/640, F/9, ISO-100 to achieve a good histogram and capture the scene in full. A little too dark but a good start.
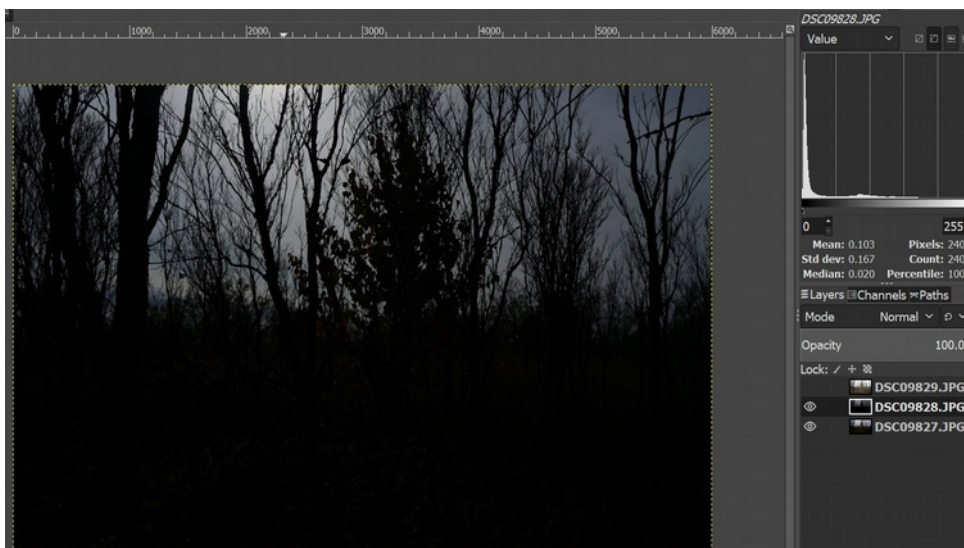
When underexposed at 1/2500 the higlights are captured in better detail. In this case the sky has better details.
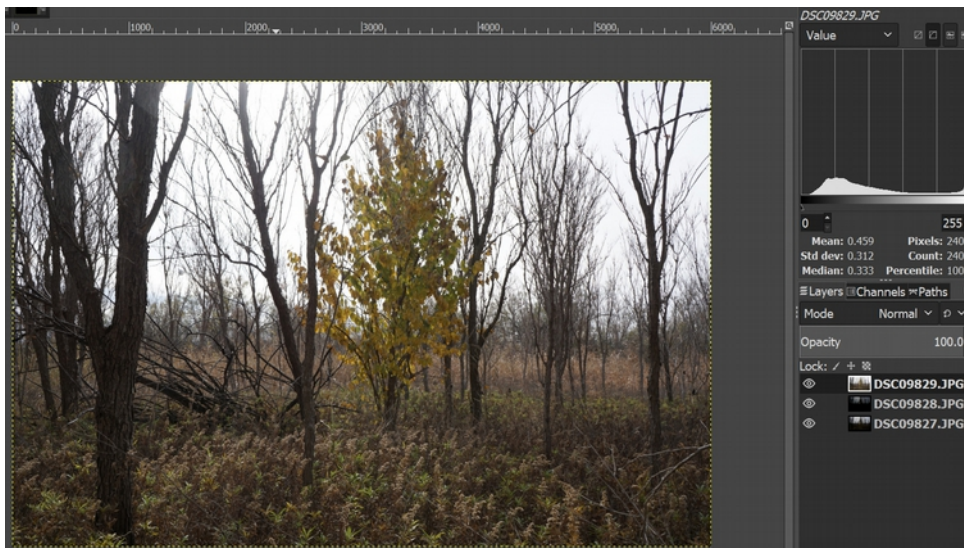
When overexposed at 1/160 the shadow areas are brought out. Generally the extremes are more visible but it was an overcast day so the need for this exposure and the previous one wasn't so critical but extra information to use in post processing isn't overkill either.

My process is based on using layers, masks, blending modes, and the opacity to combine images in the bracketed sets as a starting point.

Step 1 - Create the image to use

Layer 4 - copy of layer 1 thru 3, with layer 3 turned off as the next step
Blendmode=normal @ 50%
At this stage I make a copy of layers 1 thru 3 and deactivate layer 3 so it doesn't add back in visually.
Layer 3 - neutral Blendmode=color erase @ 100%
With the sky fixed I still have one image in the set not used so have an opportunity to experiment. It is only recently that I have began to use a blending mode called color erase, that may be unique to Gimp, that I still find interesting as it keeps some details and makes a transparency in lost areas.
Layer 2 - underexposed [layer mask=underexposed] Blendmode=multiply @ 66%
The area that can be improved is the blown out sky. The sky is in the highlights so the underexposed image can be used here. A grey scale copy as a mask limits the details used when the multiply blendingmode is used.
Layer 1 - overexposed Blendmode=normal @ 100%
This is the base image modification are applied to. Regardless of its position in the set it captured the scene the best but does room for improvement.

Step 2 – Enhance the color further

Layer 5 - solid color layer (100, 87, 39) Blendmode=color erase @ 100%
While there maybe other ways to selectively edit color I have found that sampling the color to enhance I get decent results. I selected the area with the tree to find median value of 100 for the red channel, 87 for the green channel, and 39 for the blue channel. A solid layer of the color was used. This result isn't the final step yet.
Layer 4 - copy of layer 1 thru 3, with layer 3 turned off as the next step Blendmode=normal @ 50%
x Layer 3 - neutral Blendmode=color erase @ 100%
Layer 2 - underexposed [layer mask=underexposed] Blendmode=multiply @ 66%
Layer 1 - overexposed Blendmode=normal @ 100%

Final steps – Putting the pieces together

Layer 3 results of step 2 Blendmode=normal @ 100%
The enhanced color to be applied.
Layer 2 results of step 1 coverted to greyscale Blendmode=normal @ 25%
I wanted to let the color of layer 3 to stand out so I converted the results of "step 1" to greyscale but by using a 25% opacity some the original color is also used.
Layer 1 results of step 1 left as color Blendmode=normal @ 100%

The final steps do omit some creative steps via turning off layers and changing a layers blendmode and opacity to creates a greyscale version but hopefully this will give you some insights into my manual processing of images.