

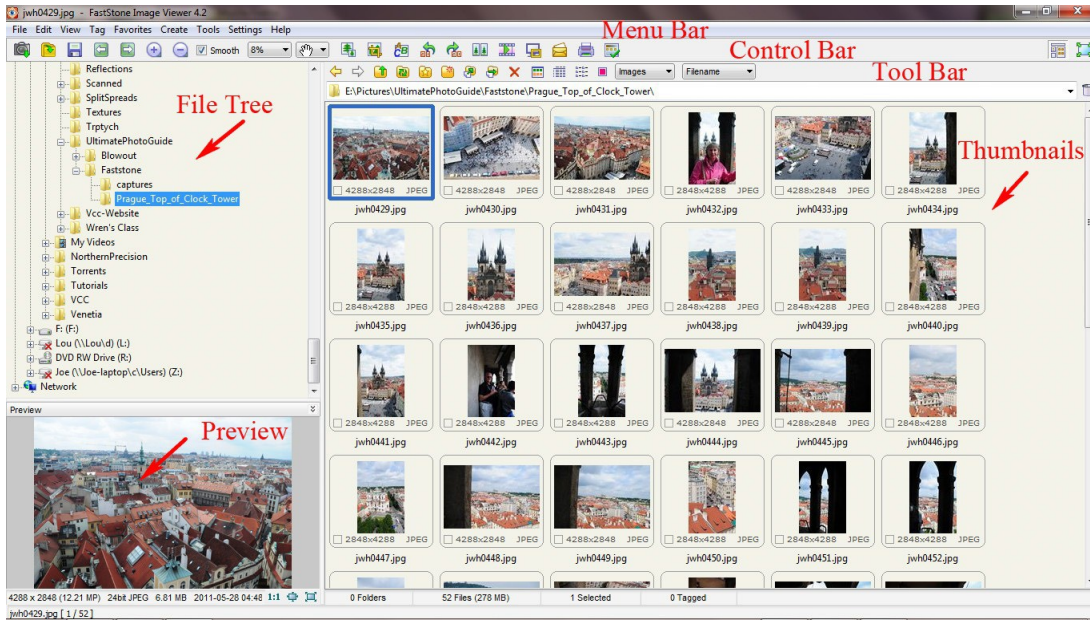
If you take lots of pictures like me then keeping your image files organized is a primary concern. There are some great programs around to help you like Lightroom and Adobe Bridge. I would like to introduce you to an inexpensive (free) alternative called Faststone Image Viewer (FIV). This program is like Windows Explorer but is dedicated to images and videos only. As a matter of fact, it even looks like Windows Explorer but has many features that Windows Explorer does not. It has similar features to Lightroom and Bridge and some additional features too. I like Bridge but this program has become my work horse and did I mention...it's free. It can be downloaded from: <http://www.faststone.org/>

The description on its website says:

FastStone Image Viewer is a fast, stable, user-friendly image browser, converter and editor. It has a nice array of features that include image viewing, management, comparison, red-eye removal, emailing, resizing, cropping, retouching and color adjustments. Its innovative but intuitive full-screen mode provides quick access to EXIF information, thumbnail browser and major functionalities via hidden toolbars that pop up when your mouse touches the four edges of the screen. Other features include a high quality magnifier and a musical slideshow with 150+ transitional effects, as well as lossless JPEG transitions, drop shadow effects, image annotation, scanner support, histogram and much more. It supports all major graphic formats (BMP, JPEG, JPEG 2000, animated GIF, PNG, PCX, PSD, EPS, TIFF, WMF, ICO and TGA) and popular digital camera RAW formats (CRW, CR2, NEF, PEF, RAF, MRW, ORF, SRF, ARW, SR2, RW2 and DNG).

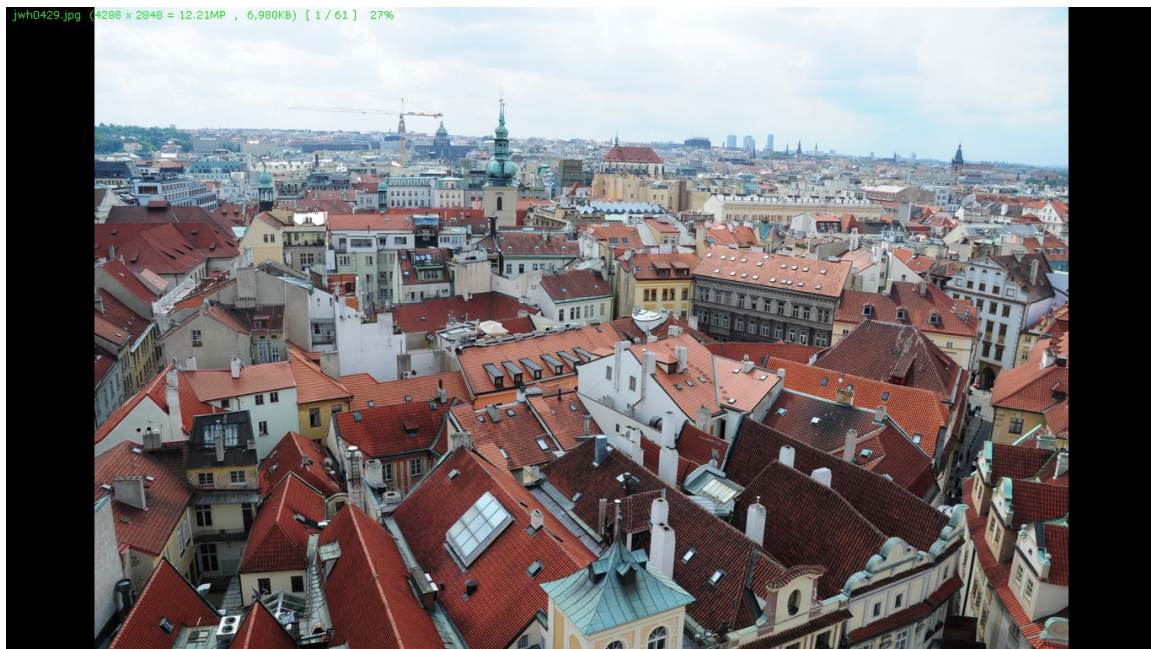
I would like to introduce two features of FIV: The two main modes, which are Explorer Mode and Full Screen Mode, and Download Photos feature.

First let's look at the Explorer Mode. As I have mentioned, it looks like Windows Explorer, with panels for the File Tree, Thumbnails and Preview and Menu, Control and Tool Bars on top.

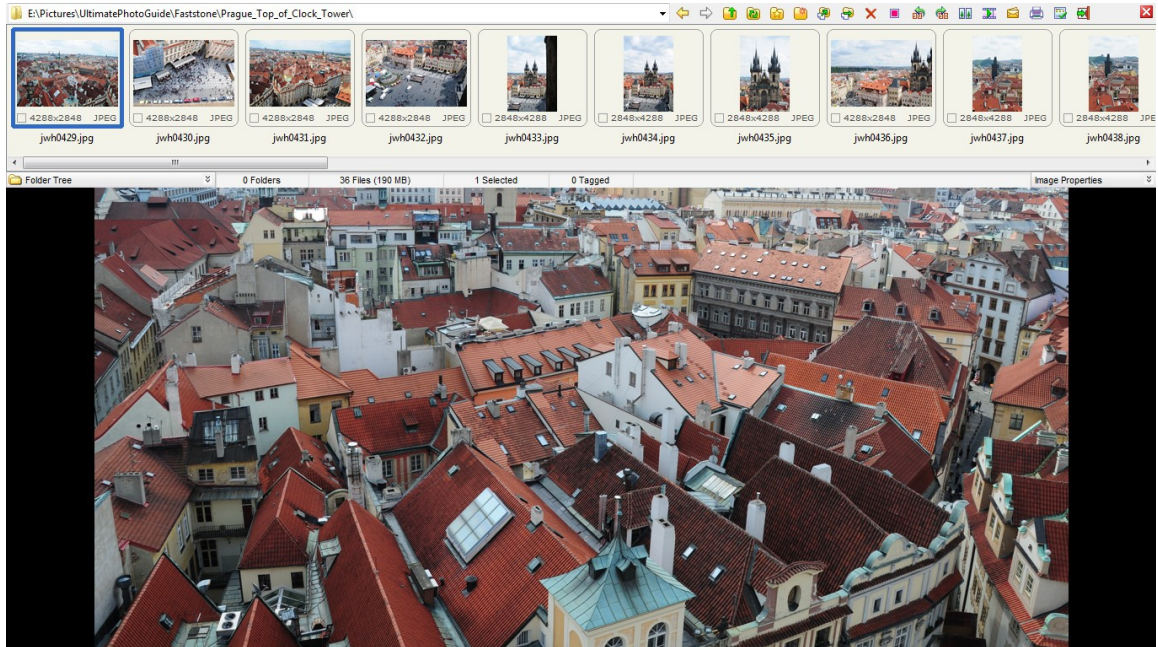


FIV is for images and videos only. If there are other types of files in this file folder like txt or xmp files, they will not be able to be seen with FIV. You will have to go to Windows Explorer. The size of the panels and thumbnails is customizable.

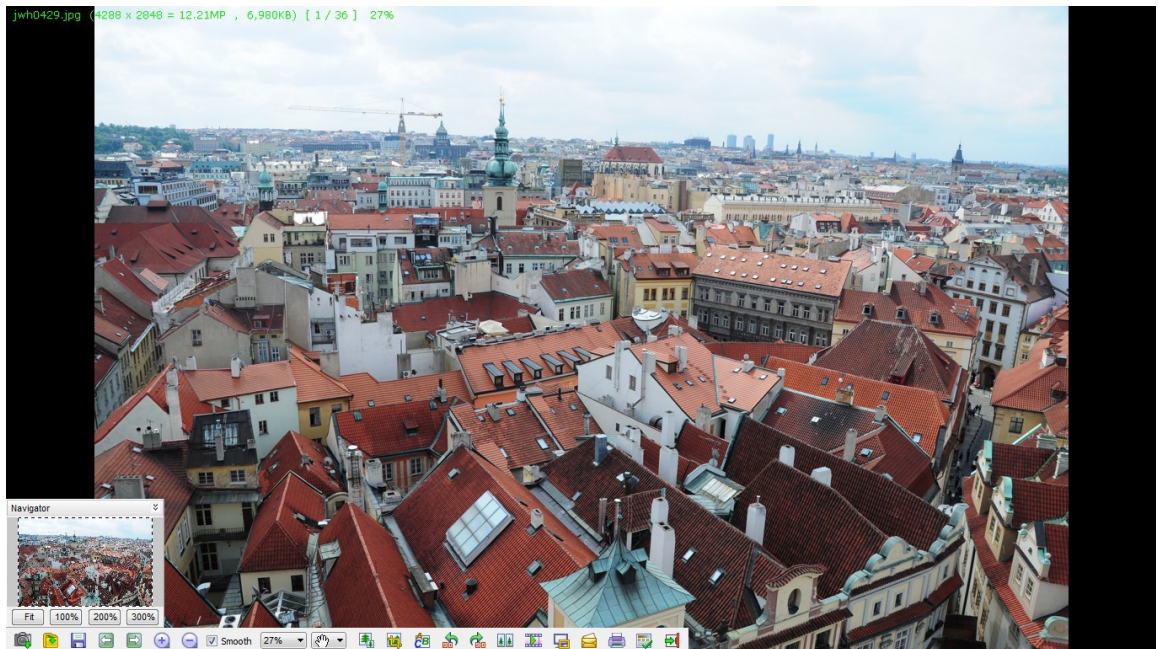
The mode I find the most useful is the Full Screen Mode. To enter it, double click on a thumbnail or select an image and press enter. Note that the file name and size are at the top. To exit Full Screen Mode and go back to Explorer Mode press Escape. In Full Screen Mode, the cursor looks like a magnifying glass. Click on the image and it will be magnified. This feature is also customizable.



Move the cursor to the top of the screen to see thumbnails of the other images that are in the same file folder. The Tool Bar also appears above the thumbnails. To see another image in Full Screen Mode click on it.

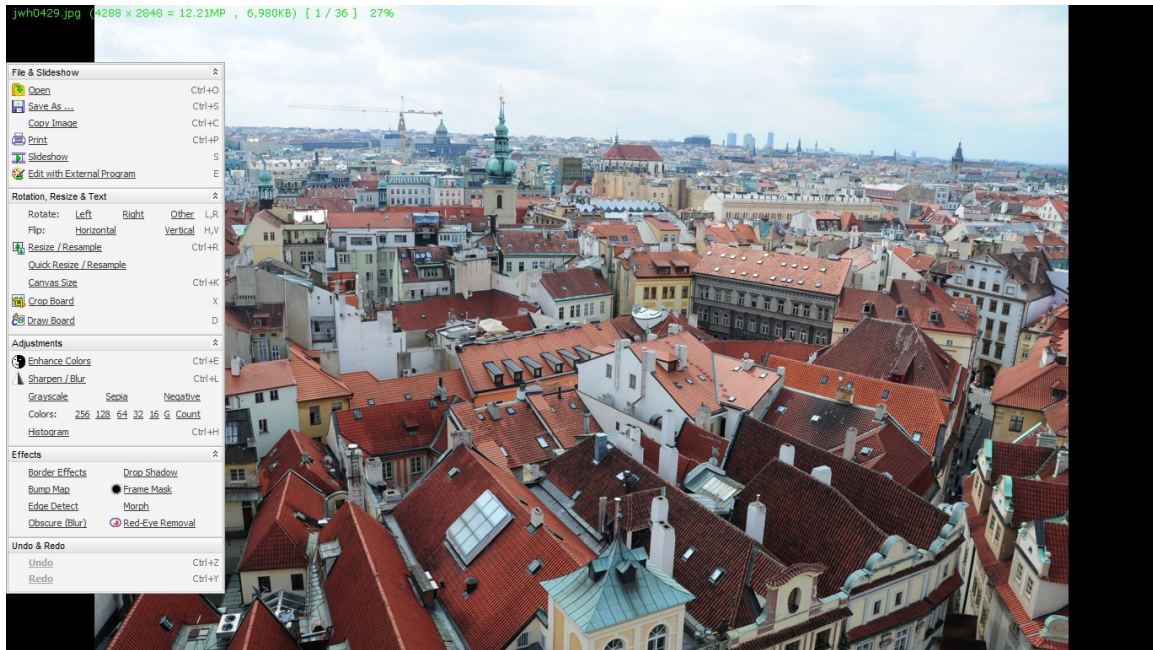


Move the cursor to the bottom of the screen and the magnifier options and the Control Bar appear.

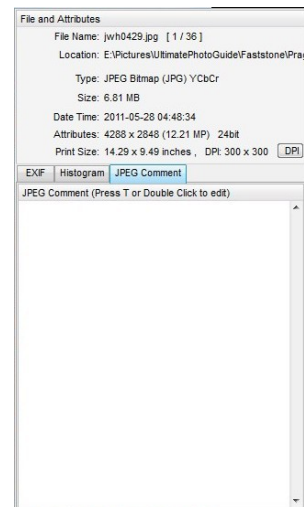
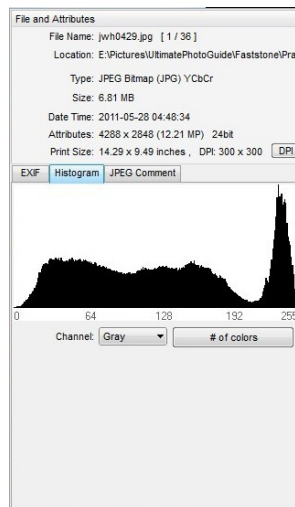
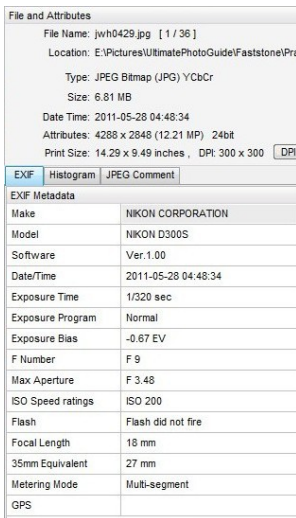
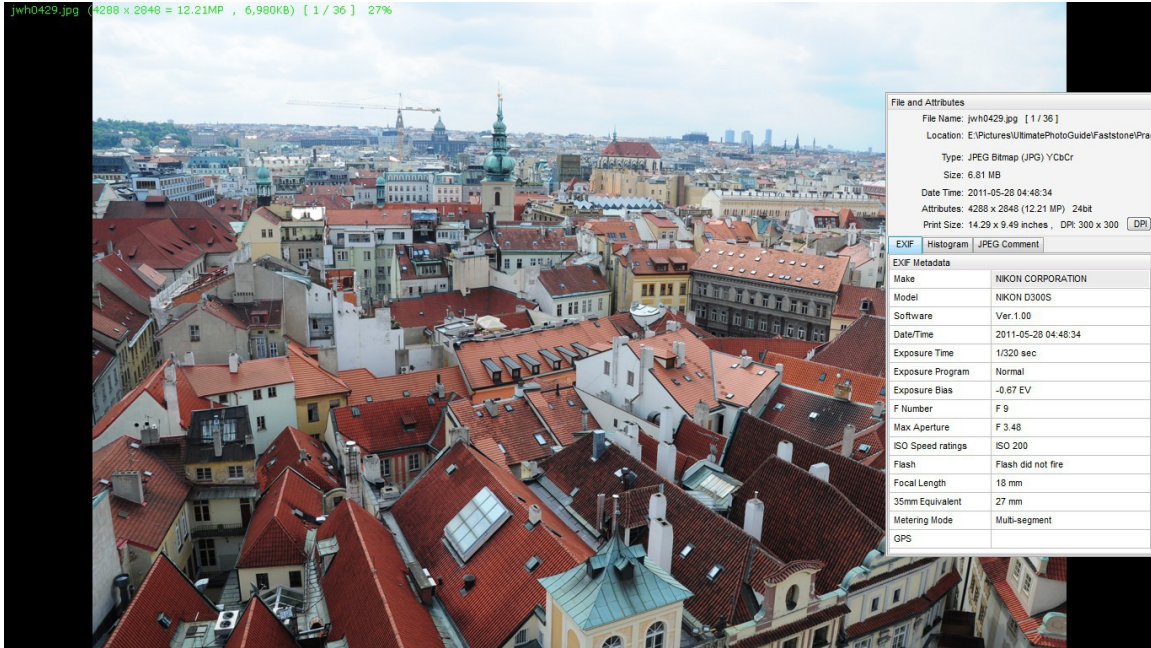


Move the cursor to the left side of the screen and an edition panel pops up with some nice features like:

- File and Slideshow options
- Rotation, Resize, Text Cropping and Cropping options
- Image Adjustment options including Hue and Saturations and Sharpening and Blur
- Effects options like Borders, Drop Shadows and Red Eye Reduction

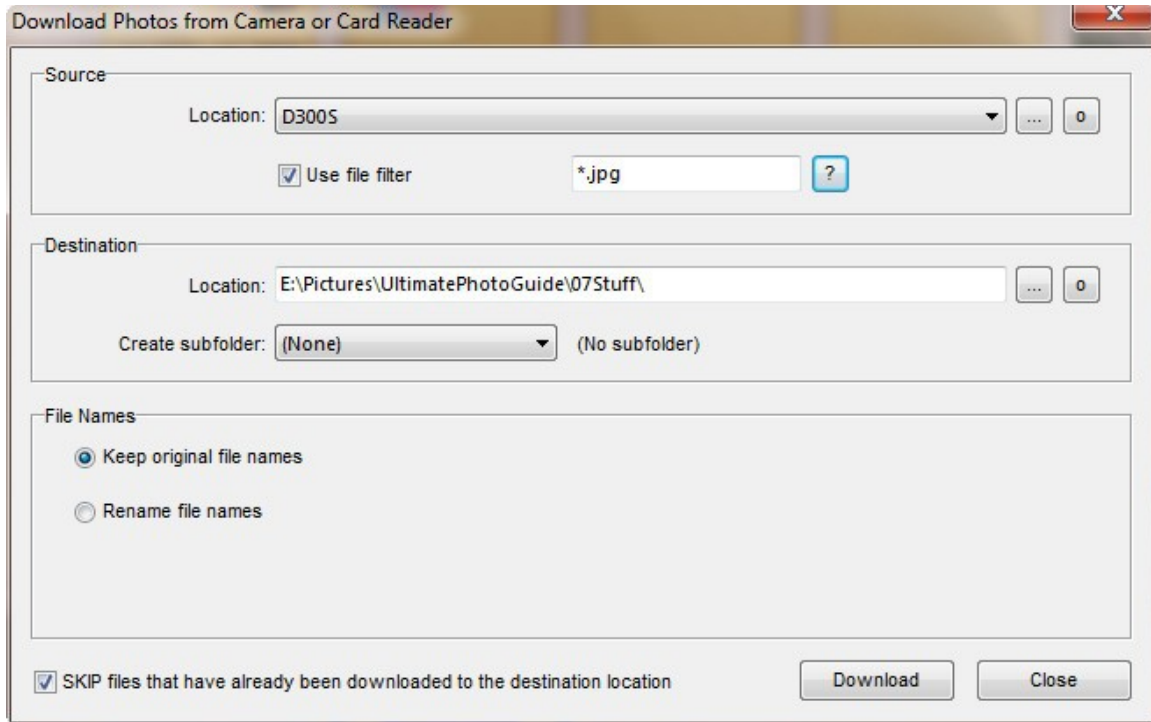


Move the cursor to the right side of the screen and the File and Attributes Panel pops up with tabs for EXIF data, Histogram and Comments.



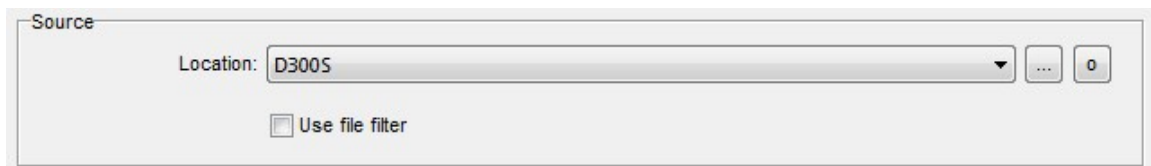
The first feature of FIV that you will want to learn to us is the Download Photos feature.


The icon for this feature  is on the Control Bar in the upper left corner under the word "File". When you click on it the Download Photos dialog box appears.

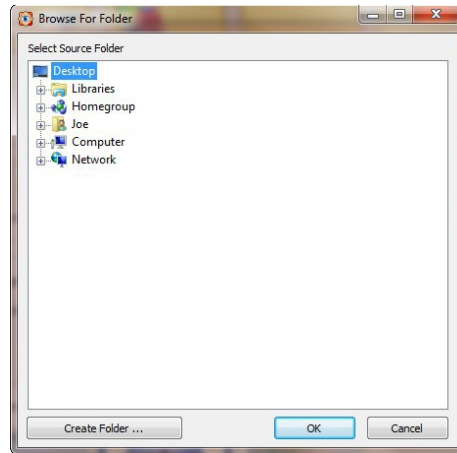



It has 3 sections: Source, Destination and File name. Let's examine each one individually. First, connect you camera to you computer through a USB port.

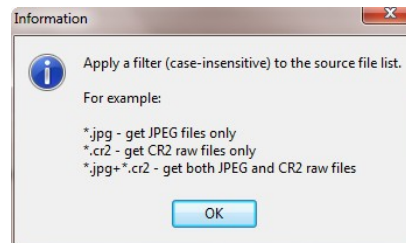
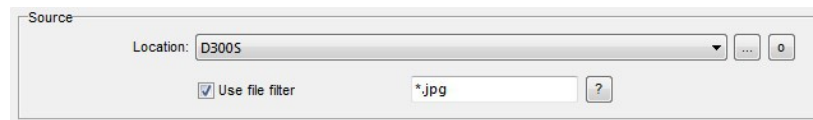
SOURCE



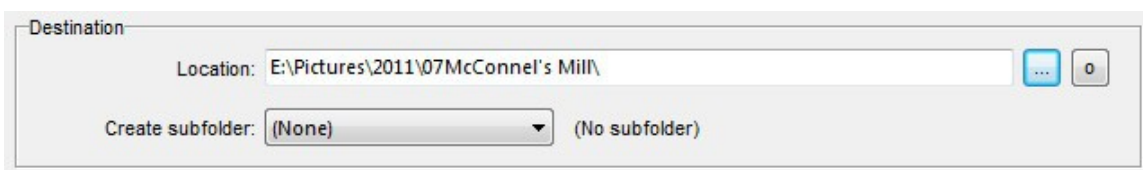
The program will automatically find your camera and put it into the source window. This might take a few seconds. It has never failed to find my camera for me but if that happens, you can find the camera manually by clicking on the ellipsis . If you do, a browser window will appear with which you can locate you camera.




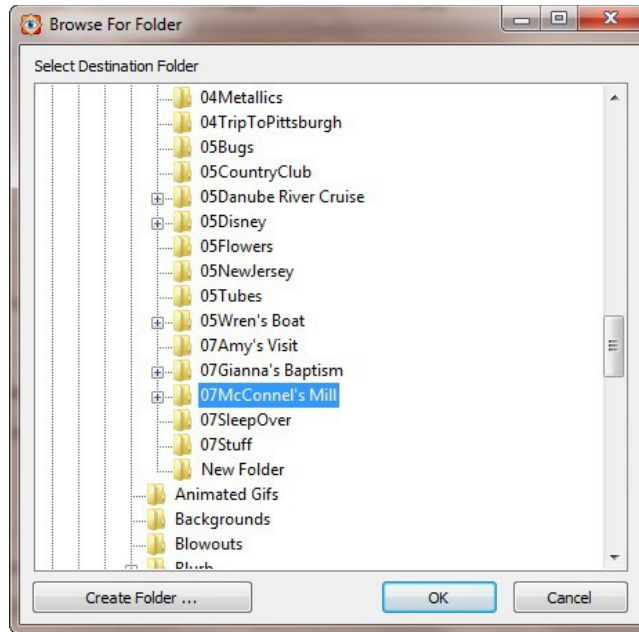
The  button is for opening your pictures into Windows Explorer rather than FIV. I have never used it. If you check the “use file filter” checkbox, a dropdown menu will appear. With it you can choose to download only jpg file or only raw files or both. If you leave the checkbox unchecked then all files will be downloaded. I always leave it unchecked.



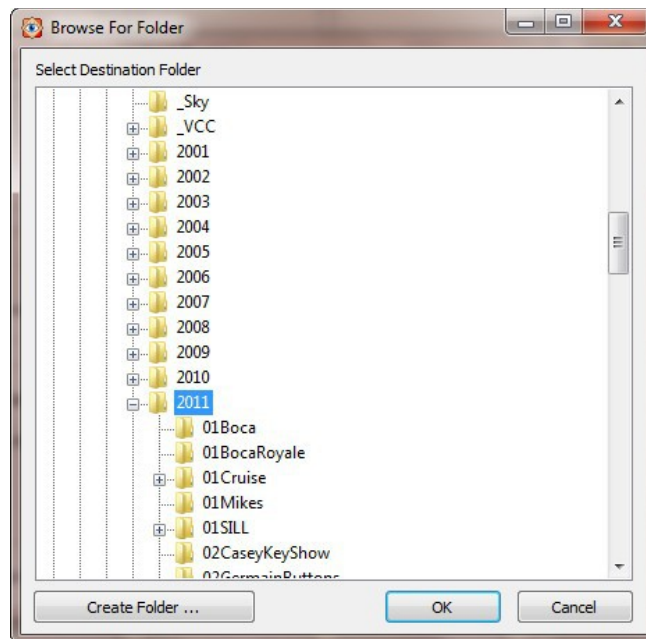
DESTINATION



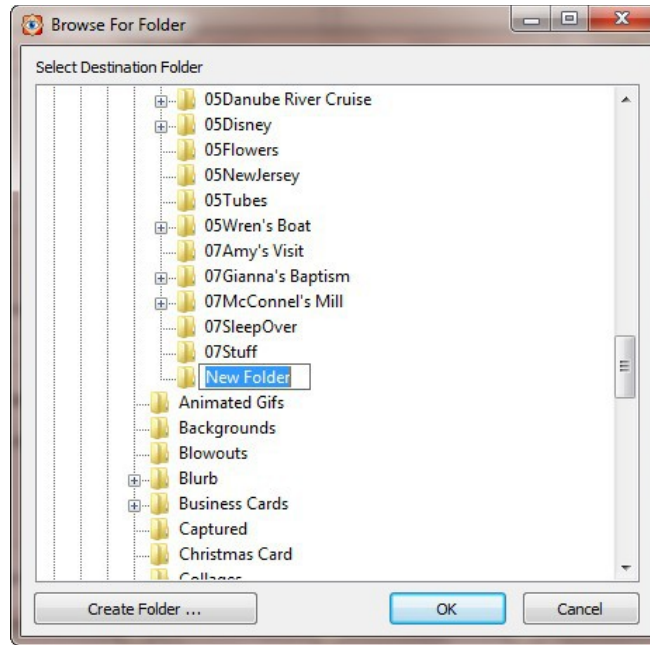
The location window will automatically contain the last folder to which you downloaded images. Click on the ellipsis  and a browser window will appear and allow you to navigate to the folder into which you want to download the current batch of pictures. It will be pointing to the last file folder that you used.



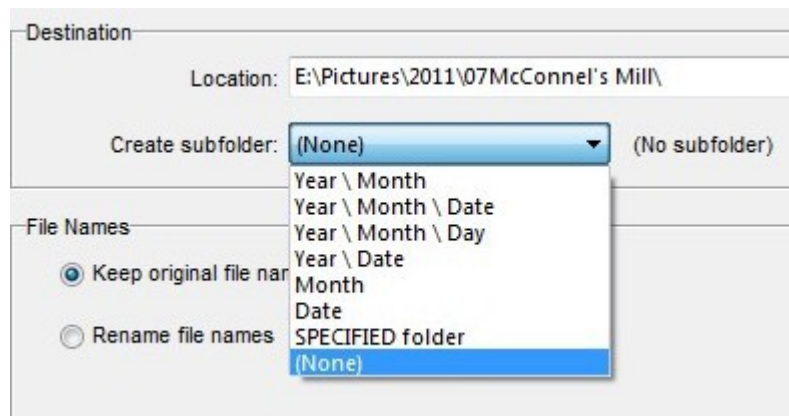
If the folder that you want to download your picture into has not been created yet, which is almost always the case, then click on the folder into which you want to create the new folder. In this case, that folder is called 2011, since I store my images chronologically.



Then click on the "Create Folder..." button, type in the new folder name and click OK.

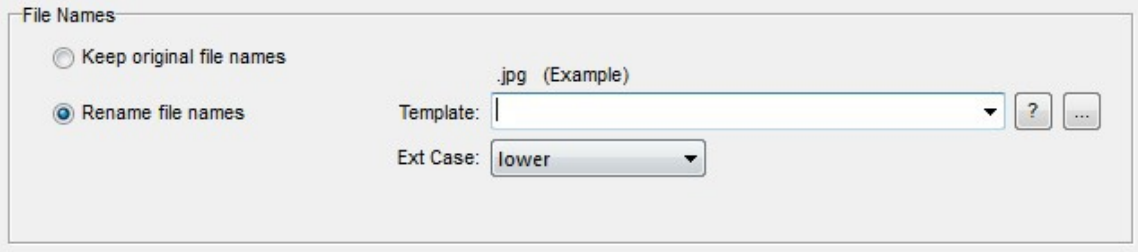



A feature in the destination box that I don't use is the "Create subfolder" drop down menu. It allows you to create subfolders inside your destination folder to separate your images by date in a variety of ways. I choose to put all of my images into the same file folder regardless of the date on which they were taken.

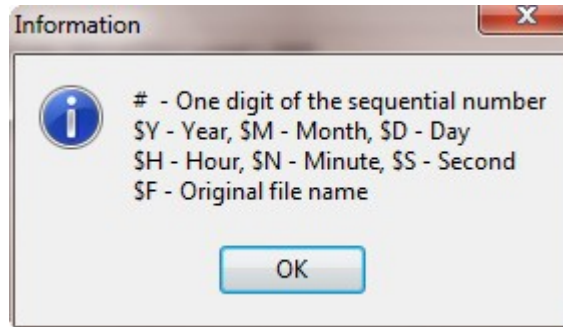


FILE NAMES

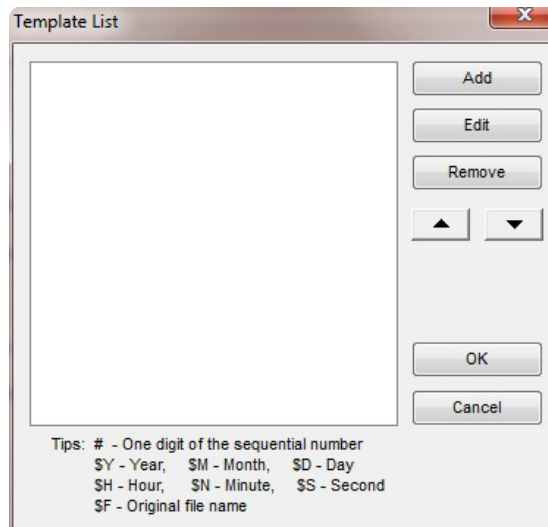
You can rename your files while they are being downloaded. If you would rather that your files have the same name that was generated by your camera then you can skip this box. I find it very useful. To use this feature click on the "Rename file names" radio button and the template drop down menu will appear.



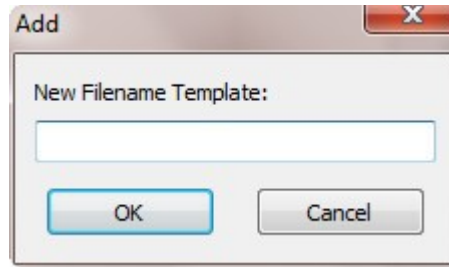
The first time that you use this box there is a lot to do. After that it's a piece of cake. At first the drop down menu has no options in it. You have to create them. There are some codes involved in this step, which you can see by clicking on the . You can include in the file name the year, month, day hour, minute and second on which the picture was taken; the original file name from the camera and or a number by using one of the codes.



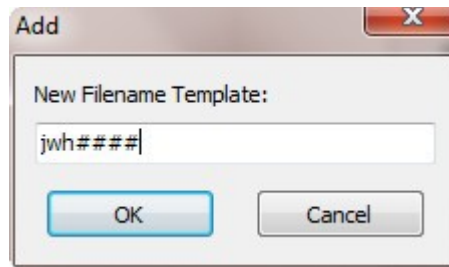
Click on the ellipsis to open the “Template list” dialog box. Note that there are no templates in the list yet and that the codes mentioned above are listed at the bottom of the box.



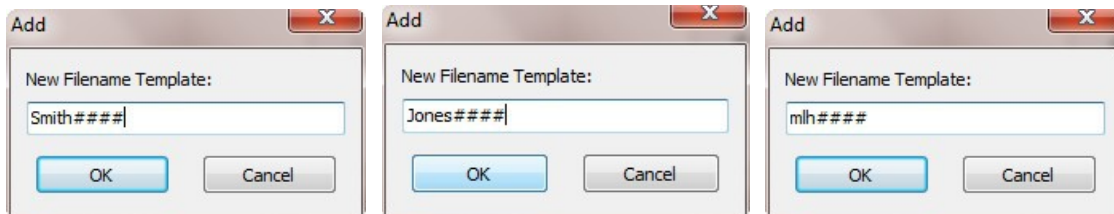
Click on the add button and an add temple box will appear.



Enter you template, using one or more of the codes and press enter. In my file names, I like to include my initials (jwh) followed by a 4 digit number which I will describe later. So, my template looks like the following:

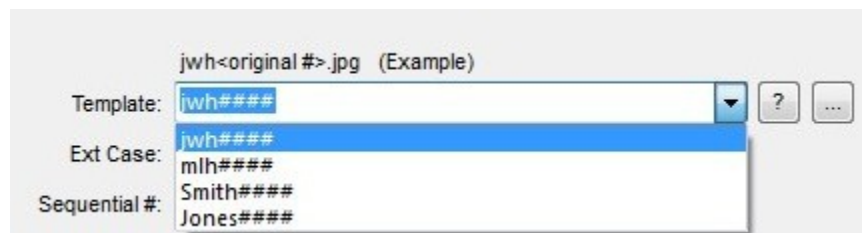


I travel a lot and, as often as possible, with friends. I like to take everyone's pictures and make a travelogue when I get home. So I create templates for each of my travel companions and one for my wife by repeating the Add process.

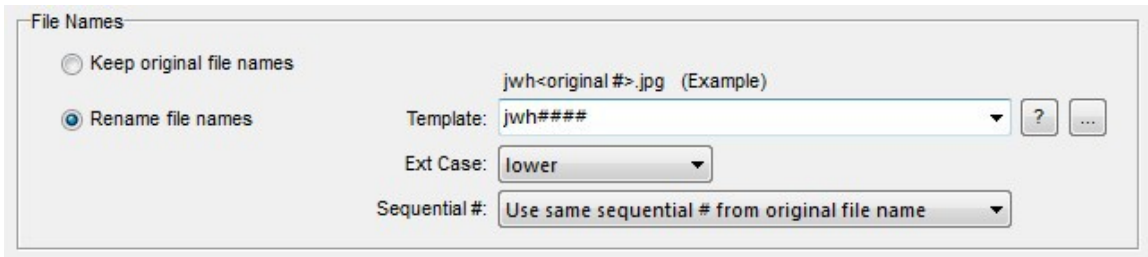


Now my template list looks like the following. I can edit, remove or change their location in the list by using the buttons on the right. When you are finished, click OK. You rarely have to alter the template list again.

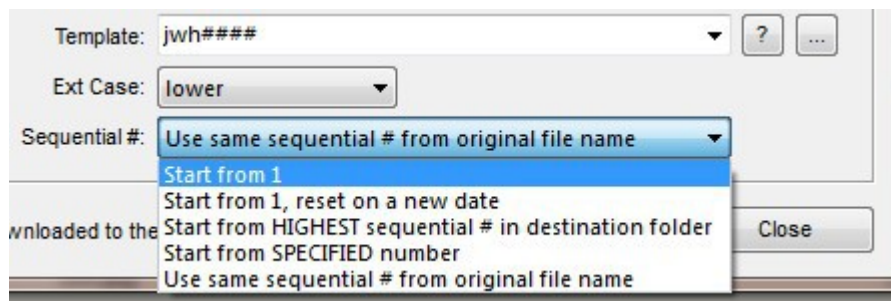
Now you can drop down the template menu and select the template you want for the files to be downloaded.



After you have made a template list the “Ext case” dropdown menu will appear which allows you to determine the case of the file extension: JPG or jpg.



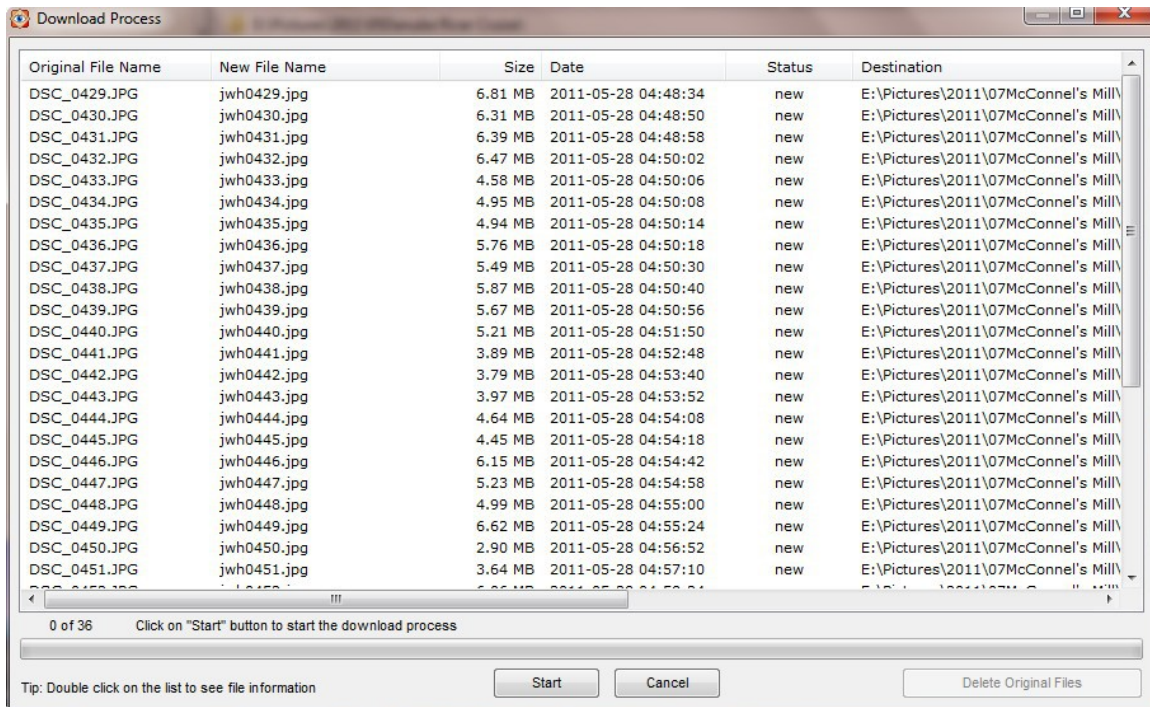
It's later and time to describe those number (#) signs. Drop down the Sequential # menu and choose from the four options listed there. I choose the last one and use the numbers generated by my camera to replace the number signs. A typical file name for me would be “jwh1234.jpg”.



I also check the box at the bottom just in case I accidentally am about to download images that I have already downloaded.



Once all of that has been set up, click the Download button. A box will appear showing the details of what is about to happen.



Click start and the download process will begin. When it is finished FIV will be in Explorer Mode in the folder into which you just downloaded the images.

The first time you use this program to download pictures you may have some work to do if you want to change the file names. Subsequent downloads will be much easier. You will probably only have to determine the destination folder. The rest should already be set up for you.

FIV has many more features that I use. Like the compare feature whereby to can see 2,3 or 4 images on the screen at the same time. So if you took several pictures of the same thing you can compare them side by side. Batch rename, file compression, slide show, email, rotation and on and on are all very useful.

Additional help on FIV can be found at: <http://www.imagingtips.com/faststone/>

Give Faststone Image Viewer a try. I am sure you will like it.

