

On Meaning in Photography

DAVID WARD ON COMMUNICATING WITH OUR ART

.....

Chris Bell

LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY IN TASMANIA

.....

Post Processing

BLACK AND WHITE FOR COLOUR PHOTOGRAPHERS

John Parminter - Featured photographer | The Diffraction Limit - How Small is Too Small?
Beating the Bounds - Chris Tancock | Does Dark Matter? - Paul Moon poses the question



Tim Parkin | Editor

INTRODUCTION

Hello and welcome to our preview copy of the On Landscape PDF edition. Our magazine has been running for over two years now and in that time I hope we have brought a new type of landscape photography publication to the market; one that is more interested in the picture than the camera, that shows you how other photographers do their work and live their lives, that enables you to get the most out of your pictures without falling into bad habits. Mostly though we hope that it helps you realise that landscape photography is a valid creative and artistic pursuit with a strong history.

Over the last two years we've shown you some amazing photographers some who work professionally but most who are of the amateur persuasion. Amateur is such a demeaning word these days when in the victorian era the amateur was lauded for their pursuit of art and craft without the distorting influence of money. We want to applaud both the amateur and the professional because it's sometimes very hard to plough your own furrow despite the distorting influence of both money and mass opinion.

On Landscape hopes to build on what we've achieved so far by creating a permanent resource for landscape photographers. We will bring you content from around the world, talking to photographers in the field or at home and commissioning inspiring content that will help the beginner and advanced landscape photographer alike.

One of our main goals will always be to support the photographer in their quest to find their own way around the landscape, both actual and metaphorical. We hope to show the huge variety of approaches to our genre from urban to wild, deadpan to sublime, intimate to grand, and help bridge the gap between the worlds of fine art contemporary photography and the popular romantic landscape. We know this isn't something we can achieve on our own or at all even with your support but if we can help make people aware of 'other' and understand something about it, we will feel like we have got somewhere.

Landscape photography is the most popular photographic genre and my own personal experience is that landscape photographers are a friendly, animated, tolerant and understanding crowd and I'm proud to play a part as a catalyst for the community at large.

So, with the relaunch of our website and pdf issue of the magazine and the expanding of our community reach I'd like to thank you for making this possible so far and hope for your continued support in the future, wherever that may lead us.

on landscape

A publication from
Landscape Media Ltd

info@onlandscape.co.uk

© 2012 Landscape Media Ltd

Reproduction in whole or in part, in any
media, is strictly prohibited.

All work remains the copyright of its
owner and is published with permission
or in good faith for review purpose only

Editor | Tim Parkin

Design | Andrew Nadolski

Cover image | John Parminter

CONTENTS

ON MEANING IN PHOTOGRAPHY

David Ward on communicating with our art

FEATURED PHOTOGRAPHER

John Parminter

POST PROCESSING

An Introduction to Black and White for Colour photographers

INTERVIEW

Chris Tancock – Beating the Bounds

THE SCIENCE OF PHOTOGRAPHY

The diffraction limit – How Small is Too Small?

INTERVIEW

Chris Bell

POST PROCESSING

Does Dark Matter?

On Meaning in Photography

DAVID WARD ON COMMUNICATING WITH OUR ART

Photographic description alone will never be inspirational, never make a heart beat faster, never bring a tear to another's face. To achieve these things emotional messages must somehow be woven seamlessly into the photographic representation. But beyond what is baldly described by the light captured in a scene, the exact meaning of photographs is elusive. We read them but it's not like reading prose, there's no dictionary that we can refer to for definitions. Every viewer reads them in a subtly different way and their meaning may also alter for different viewings by the same viewer.



Photographs' descriptive power is almost overwhelming, sometimes it's as if the images shout about the contents of their frame. Yet, almost lost in the cacophony of detail, deeper messages are being whispered. Despite the difficulty of hearing them, we know that the messages are there because we know that photographs can move us. Photographic description alone will never be inspirational, never make a heart beat faster, never bring a tear to another's face. To achieve these things emotional messages must somehow be woven seamlessly into the photographic representation. But beyond what is baldly described by the light captured in a scene, the exact meaning of photographs is elusive. We read them but it's not like reading prose, there's no dictionary that we can refer to for definitions. Every viewer reads them in a subtly different way and their meaning may also alter for different viewings by the same viewer. Photographs' descriptive power is almost overwhelming, sometimes it's as if the images shout about the contents of their frame. Yet, almost lost in the cacophony of detail, deeper messages are being whispered. Despite the difficulty of hearing them, we know that the messages are there because we know that photographs can move us.

When a photograph evokes something beyond the mere description of what's in front of the camera I think of it as transcending its subject matter. A transcendent image is therefore more than just an illustration: the message it imparts is more than the sum of the tones and forms that are amassed in the frame, more than the sum of labels that can be attached to its contents; a transcendent image moves us because of something beyond what is described. The question arises, how are these messages transmitted? Where is the emotional meta data held in a photograph? In this article I will be looking for the sources of this secondary information.

Consider the postcard image of the Austrian Tyrol above. When we 'read' a photograph, the first thing we do is to look for things we recognise and mentally attach linguistic or pattern labels to



these objects. Our first read of this image might therefore go something like this: 'tree', 'tree', 'tree', 'tree', 'tree', 'tree', 'tree', 'sky', 'sky', 'sky', 'mountain', 'mountain', 'snow', 'mountain', 'cow', 'cow', 'grass', 'grass', 'grass', 'grass' more 'grass' and 'cloud'. A list of nouns isn't very exciting is it? (Incidentally, it's a myth that in the Western world we read a photograph left to right. Our eyes actually move across an image in a complicated pattern, moving up and down, right to left and left to right at seemingly random angles according to what we find interesting in the image. We also frequently return to some points, such as the eyes in a face. It may be a convenient stick for a judge to beat an image with but it makes no difference to how an image is read whether the principle object in a scene is placed on one side of the frame or the other. The 'preferred' placement is simply a matter of tradition.)

You'll notice that all the labels I've mentioned are nouns. Yet we rarely get an emotional response simply from a noun – tax-inspector being an obvious exception! To signify emotions we need to look for adjectives or adverbs in the image such as 'green', 'blue', or, even better, 'peaceful', 'still' or 'sunny'.

"...WHEN WE 'READ' A PHOTOGRAPH, THE FIRST THING WE DO IS TO LOOK FOR THINGS WE RECOGNISE AND MENTALLY ATTACH LINGUISTIC OR PATTERN LABELS TO THESE OBJECTS... IT'S A MYTH THAT IN THE WESTERN WORLD WE READ A PHOTOGRAPH LEFT TO RIGHT. OUR EYES ACTUALLY MOVE ACROSS AN IMAGE IN A COMPLICATED PATTERN, MOVING UP AND DOWN, RIGHT TO LEFT AND LEFT TO RIGHT AT SEEMINGLY RANDOM ANGLES ACCORDING TO WHAT WE FIND INTERESTING IN THE IMAGE"

Above: Tyrolean Postcard photographer unknown

Obviously there is degree of consensus on the definition of some visual adjectives – ‘green’, ‘blue’ etc. – whilst others have more plastic definitions – ‘wild’ for instance. But the central problem with wanting to use photographs to express how we feel about our chosen subject is that whilst every photograph is heavily laden with visual ‘nouns’ (description) there is no single fixed interpretation of their emotional significance. To show how complicated the question of interpretation is let’s consider just the colour adjectives for a moment. Any colour has a wide range of emotional information associated with it, some of it cultural, some personal and, as I shall point out later, some of it hardwired into our brains. Red, for instance, is the colour of blood, said to be the most emotionally intense colour but it is also thought of as optimistic and sexy. In Russian there is a linguistic link between the word for red and the word for beauty. This might be why the Bolsheviks chose red for their flag. But even if it were not it means that red now also has a political connotation. It’s also thought of as aggressive, it stands for danger and stop! It stands out from the background better than any other colour; perhaps this is why some wag once suggested that RPS stands for red patch somewhere? That’s quite a range of possible responses and I’m probably only scratching the surface. There will be other attributes of red that are of personal significance to individuals; perhaps that shade was the colour of your first bike, or the colour of your beloved’s lipstick, or the colour of your favourite football team’s shirts. And it’s not simply a question of any sign being present; how it’s interpreted will depend upon its context. And how the viewer is feeling... Complicated, isn’t it?

So, our reading of the visual nouns would seem straightforward enough but for the fact that we all habitually and unconsciously attach a personal history and significance to objects and places which colours how we interpret them. Our personal experience and the cultural symbols that we have absorbed throughout our lives can lend significance to any part of

an image. This level of meaning is classified as residing in signs. Hopefully you can see from my brief look at the colour red that the adjectival labelling is an example a subtle sign system. Signs can exist as text, images, symbols, flags, objects, sounds, colours, smells, facial expressions or physical gestures. Signs can be grouped into languages (body language for instance) in a similar way to words, though the boundaries between these languages are not as distinct as those between spoken languages. Signs are literally anything that communicates a meaning or emotion to us, whether that meaning can be expressed in words or not.

So anything that we see in a photograph might be suggesting something other than just itself. For adherents of the mystical tradition in photography a cloud in a photograph isn’t always just a cloud but, as Tim pointed out in his recent article, in the case of Alfred Stieglitz it was also an expression of how he felt. Beyond this personal perspective, objects or places have often been widely adopted in a culture to stand for things other than just themselves. To grasp this idea one need only think of how living things have been used as symbols to suggest specific attributes; a lion for valour, an oak for strength or an owl for wisdom. Sometimes, as in heraldic symbols, this system of representation is meticulously codified.

Signs

A rigorous study of signs began at the beginning of the 20th century when a group of philosophers began looking, as Daniel Chandler noted, “for ‘deep structures’ underlying the ‘surface features’ of phenomena.” These ‘Structuralists’ included the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. He proposed a study of signs; anything that signifies something to us and not just the kind that read ‘Keep of the Grass’ or ‘No Waiting’. Perhaps appropriately, philosophers can’t agree a name for the study of signs; it is known variously as semiotics or semiology – it hasn’t even been agreed whether linguistics is part of the study of

“...OUR PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND THE CULTURAL SYMBOLS THAT WE HAVE ABSORBED THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES CAN LEND SIGNIFICANCE TO ANY PART OF AN IMAGE. THIS LEVEL OF MEANING IS CLASSIFIED AS RESIDING IN SIGNS.”



signs or vice versa! Throughout this article I will refer to the insights Frenchman Roland Barthes who was for many years, until his death in the 1980's, the leading theoretician using semiotics to analyse photography.

Linguists, like Saussure, realised that words are arbitrary symbols: there can be no innate link between the object and the word attached to it. Such a link would deny the possibility of naming the same thing 'dog', 'hund' or 'chien' – it would preclude the existence of more than one language. This arbitrary nature extends to all other sign systems and therefore any sign may have a multiplicity of meanings. Consider, now, how a photograph of a single crooked tree atop a rocky hill might stand for 'loneliness' or 'deforestation' or 'perseverance' or 'old age' or 'life' – or maybe even 'wind'. Semiotologists would recognise the tree as a sign and refer to its 'standing for something else' as connotation and its 'standing for itself' as denotation; so our example tree would, amongst other things, denote crookedness and hawthorn and might connote life and loneliness. As soon as you place two connotations next to each other the complexity of the result is much greater than just double, since it calls to mind yet more signs that evoke the same idea.

The principle difference between words (so called natural language) and other kinds of signs is that words have widely accepted definitions of meaning (otherwise there could not be dictionaries) whereas the latter usually do not – though of course the meaning of some is prescribed, just think how much more chaotic our roads would be if we didn't all agree on what road signs meant! The lack of definition is because our reading of signs, other than words, is both culturally specific and partly subjective. It is also because, as Emile Benveniste asserted, "We are not able to say 'the same thing' in systems based upon different units." Others, though, have asserted that all other signs can be expressed in written language; Marvin Harris opined that, "human languages are unique among communication systems in possessing semantic universality... [in being able] to convey

information about all aspects [of experience] whether actual or possible, real or imaginary." Lucky chap, he has obviously never been 'lost for words'! Just think about how inadequate words can be for describing smells or colours and you will see that, whilst it may be true that we can describe anything with them, words are not truly equivalent to the thing described. In a similar vein, the curator, photographer and critic John Szarkowski wrote that, "The meanings of words and those of pictures are at best parallel, describing two lines of thought that do not meet. If our concern is for meanings in pictures, verbal descriptions are finally gratuitous."

Signs that have a wider cultural meaning are referred to as icons and form a particularly interesting group. Examples from different fields might be Marilyn Monroe, Everest or a Rolex watch. Each of these icons connotes a wide range of subtle but powerful messages. For Monroe for instance we might read movie star/tragedy/beauty/glamour/sex. Icons are potent signs because their range of connotation is widely accepted. The inclusion of any well-known cultural icon in a photograph strongly affects how we read the image. (This has implications for how we caption images since the mere naming of a well-known place will to some degree alter how people think about the image.) Perhaps the best example of a landscape icon in the UK is the Buchaillie Etive Mor, or more correctly the east-facing crag called Stob Dearg. It appears in so many images because its shape mimics the classic pyramidal shape drawn by any child asked to depict a mountain. You might say that it represents mountain-ness in its most concentrated form – especially when covered with a mantle of snow. The problem with including icons in a photograph is that they have a tendency to polarise interpretation because there comes a hard to define point where an icon tips over into a cliché. For some people photographing Stob Dearg is still a dearly held goal whilst for others its mere mention turns them off because they see it as having been done to death.

"...FOR SOME PEOPLE
PHOTOGRAPHING STOB
DEARG IS STILL A
DEARLY HELD GOAL
WHILST FOR OTHERS ITS
MERE MENTION TURNS
THEM OFF BECAUSE
THEY SEE IT AS HAVING
BEEN DONE TO DEATH."



“..ALL FORMS OF VISUAL REPRESENTATION, INCLUDING PHOTOGRAPHY, SHARE ONE ATTRIBUTE; THE IMAGE IS NOT ONLY A MIRROR FOR THE ARTIST’S EXPERIENCE BUT ALSO FOR THOSE OF THE VIEWER. THE MEANINGS THAT WE EXTRACT FROM AN IMAGE ARE NECESSARILY FLAVOURED BY INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES SINCE EVERY VIEWER BRINGS HIS OR HER OWN INTELLECTUAL AND EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE TO THE VIEWING..”

When Barthes wrote in his last book, 'Camera Lucida', that, "A photograph is always invisible, it is not it that we see"; he meant that the meaning we gain from a photograph derives from a whole range of signs and symbols that we understand in a wider context external to the image. The key point is that we read a photograph; viewing one is an active, not a passive process. Some of these signs appear to be universal (e.g. some facial expressions), others are widespread but culturally specific (e.g. religious symbols) and still others are peculiar to the individual viewer arising from their personal experiences (e.g. I hate that shade of green!). The response to some other signs is very deeply seated, perhaps even hardwired. Research has shown that some of the light entering our eyes transmits signals directly to the hypothalamus, one of the oldest parts of the brain and part of the limbic system. Light shifted towards either the red end or the blue end of the spectrum evokes an instinctive emotional response from the limbic system relating to temperature. We even call these colours, respectively, warm light and cold light.

All forms of visual representation, including photography, share one attribute; the image is not only a mirror for the artist's experience but also for those of the viewer. The meanings that we extract from an image are necessarily flavoured by individual responses since every viewer brings his or her own intellectual and emotional baggage to the viewing. The precise source of these personal responses is by rights the domain of psychology and psychoanalysis in the Freudian or Jungian tradition and beyond the scope of this article but we must always be aware that these personal responses are inevitable. This individuality of response means that not only will single signs evoke different connotations for different people but also that any given sign may evoke no response at all in some individuals. There will be common points of contact but also areas where meaning drifts for each individual, in the same way that no two people will get exactly the same meaning from a poem. Just as the conjunction of words produce indefinable and unstable thoughts and feelings

which change from one person to another, and sometimes subtly from one reading to the next, so the effect of an image on the viewer changes from one person to another. For some the reflection of the photographer's viewpoint by the image is smooth and almost perfect, for others it resembles more the grotesque distortions encountered in a fairground Hall of Mirrors.

As I mentioned earlier, the great American photographer Alfred Stieglitz proposed that a series of his photographs of clouds where in a sense equivalent to how he felt about his subject. The problem with the notion of Equivalence is that not only should the object photographed evoke an emotional response in the photographer but that, by dint of his expertise and insight, he is thought able to evoke the exact same response in the viewer. John Szarkowski curated an exhibition entitled 'Mirrors & Windows at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1978 that has greatly influenced subsequent ideas about the interpretation of photographs. The premise for the show was that all photographs are either mirrors reflecting the photographer who made them or windows presenting the photographer's view of the outside world. The former tell us more about the photographer than about reality, and the intent of the latter is to tell us more about reality than about the photographer. In Szarkowski's terms Stieglitz's Equivalents are mirroring the photographer's concerns and presenting them as a perfect reflection to the viewer. This could only possibly be true if there were single fixed meanings for visual signs and, as we have seen, there are none. Another American photographer, Minor White, offered little practical advice on how to achieve 'equivalence' beyond his somewhat gnomic comment that, 'When a photograph is a mirror of the man and the man is a mirror of the world, Spirit might take over.' However he seemed to realize that something more than a simple intent to express emotional response was needed because he added that, 'It follows that "self-expression" as the aim of the photographer is not in itself sufficient.'

"...THE PHOTOGRAPHER SUGGESTS A COURSE BY THE CONTENT OF THE IMAGE BUT CANNOT ENSURE THAT THE VIEWER WILL SAFELY REACH THE INTENDED PORT."



There can never be a guarantee of Equivalence, only a striving towards it. Individual responses do not mean that interpretations are cut entirely adrift, at the mercy of unstable currents of meaning. The photographer suggests a course by the content of the image but cannot ensure that the viewer will safely reach the intended port. The reading of an image can be directed further by captioning the image, which serves to emphasise certain aspects over others.

Is, then, a common inner meaning really unreachable and if so aren't we then left just with the surface gloss? Photographer and theorist, Victor Burgin insists that a single common meaning beyond a simple description of the contents of the photograph is indeed unreachable because, "There is no language of photography, no single signifying system... upon which all photographs depend." This contrasts with classical painting. Many works by grand masters from the Renaissance onwards depicted scenes from the Bible or other mythologies. Figures and places depicted in these masterpieces had a range of accepted meanings, so the cognoscenti (i.e. the rich patrons and those involved in the production of such art) could read them. It's important to note that the paintings were not equivalent to prose but nearer to stanzas of poetry, with all the fuzziness of meaning that suggests. Nevertheless there was an accepted codified system of signs. Such a painting contained a limited range of signs with broadly accepted meanings but in a photograph the signs are not so constrained. To return to my earlier question, we are definitely not left just with the surface gloss in a photograph, but rather with a very complex set of signs to decode.

In any single photograph we will read a lot of different signs, often from totally different sign systems. In a portrait photograph, for instance, we might read signs relating to the style of photography, body language (including facial expression), clothing, age, era, location, social status, race and so on. Some of the processes by which we read these signs are conscious but many are not. The photographer cannot know how the

viewer might respond to any one of these signs, let alone the entirety of signs within the image. By careful composition, the photographer might be able to limit the choice but there will always be the possibility that something of personal significance to the viewer subtly changes or even entirely subverts the intended message.

So where does this get us when we're thinking about making photographs? Landscape photography in the traditional view has essentially been a documentary practice in the sense of recording an image rather than constructing one but, as we have seen in the last issue of *On Landscape*, this is changing for many practitioners who use montage widely or even exclusively. The possibility exists for these photographers to construct a message from a series of icons. I feel that because the breadth of interpretation is so wide photographers might be tempted to pick icons with the narrowest possible interpretation. The danger arises of the message being clunky. Instead of it being subtle and seamless, like finely crafted prose or (more desirably) poetry, it might look like a group of disparate words. For the traditionalists, the search for symbolic meaning is necessarily constrained by what the landscape has to offer in any particular location. I feel that it is better to react instinctively rather than to try and consciously include signs. Whatever we do at a conscious level there is bound to be a huge amount of signification that we are only subconsciously aware of. Trying to control the signification completely is fruitless task, likely to result in a stilted conversation with our viewers. Where the notion of signs really helps is when we're trying to understand why an image moves us, whether it be another photographer's or one of our own. I feel certain that the accumulation of this understanding over a long period will help us to craft our images more skilfully.

“...SO WHERE DOES THIS GET US WHEN WE’RE THINKING ABOUT MAKING PHOTOGRAPHS? LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE TRADITIONAL VIEW HAS ESSENTIALLY BEEN A DOCUMENTARY PRACTICE IN THE SENSE OF RECORDING AN IMAGE RATHER THAN CONSTRUCTING ONE...”

on landscape

Join the discussion

.....
www.onlandscape.co.uk/2012/02/on-meaning-in-photography
.....



Featured photographer

Running up that hill...

JOHN PARMINTER

RUNNING UP THAT HILL...

THE MOUNTAIN PHOTOGRAPHS OF JOHN PARMINTER

What photographic moments have most transformed your thinking about photography (or have just had you jumping up and down for joy!?)

This is the hardest question Tim and I actually left it last to answer; I do know though that I am not an excitable type to be jumping up and down, far too old for that anyway!

There have been a few transition periods in my relatively short photographic time, for the first year I was in the distinct phase of learning how the camera and lens worked and what I or it needed to do to make reasonable photos. I quickly understood the mechanics and basic physics though and this was made easier I think with me being an Engineer and having a good grasp of technical concepts and devices.

The next phase was concentrating more on the artistic elements needed to make better images such as understanding which exposure to choose for my creative intent, focusing and DOF, motion etc. Although I must qualify by stating that I'm not a creative type by nature.

Then about how way through I became far more concise on the type of images I really wanted to take and became much less random, around about this time I also stopped chasing the light. By this I mean that I became much more subject driven, I stopped taking images of random things that happened to be illuminated in great light and concentrated far more on photogenic subjects that I wanted to capture that were enhanced by complimentary light. A good example of this would be me haring off down to the beach at

the sniff of a decent sunset without much consideration for subject but hell bent on light and colours. Actually I don't think there is anything wrong with this approach and I should do a bit more of it as it can be very relaxing enjoying a spectacular sunset but more on this later why it is on-hold at present.

How long have you been a 'photographer' and what connection with the landscape have you had before you started?

I've been taking photos seriously for the last five years once I bought my first digital camera, I'm uncomfortable calling myself a 'photographer' as I have no formal training and I don't make a living from photography. I'm a 'camera user' though and know how to use it enough to produce results that please me. Prior to buying my first DSLR I only had various automatic pocket cameras that I would very sporadically take a few rolls of film for snapshots only. These would be sent off to Boots for processing then invariably be left in their packets and boxed away in the attic once I had taken an initial look at them, I wasn't really interested in photography or producing images other than the aforementioned snaps. I'm still not that interested in the 'art' of photography preferring just to use it as a tool to create the results I want whether that be a print for home, sharing on my website or progressing my long term project.

I have though been an avid outdoor person for the last 35 odd years of my now maturing 45 years of age. I was born and brought



up on the coastal edge of the Lake District underneath Black Combe for anyone who knows the west coast of Cumbria and I still live close by and am fortunate to view 'The Combe' from my home. I was introduced to the fells around age 11 when my older brother thought it would be entertaining to take me up Blencathra via Sharp Edge on a windy and icy winter's day, a life defining moment and I've never looked back since. During my teens I walked most things the Lake District could offer soon progressing to donning shorts and vest and quickly took up fell running both for pleasure and competition. Learnt to drive then the hills of Yorkshire, Wales and Scotland beckoned. So, here I am, still walking and running over the hills but perhaps a bit more sedately and a lot less recklessly than my younger days, although I still think I can run races at similar youthful times!!

How did you actually get into photography in the first place?

A relative gave me a £20 birthday gift to go towards buying a picture of Black Combe, I searched and scouted for a decent picture I could buy to frame and hang on my wall but after a few months of unsuccessful looking I came to the conclusion that I could try and photograph it myself. This coincided with my consciousness becoming aware that digital SLR technology was advancing to a point where they were of good quality and obtainable by non-photographers, me basically. I did a wee bit of research and bought a Nikon D40 as a Christmas present for myself then spent the next 6 months working out all these strange and peculiar new concepts of ISO, f-stops, White Balance and apertures etc.

I probably had an unconscious desire as well to start photographing the hills and landscapes that I was walking and running over, perhaps turning forty was another trigger that made me part with cash for a camera. Not that it had anything to do with a mid-life crisis or anything!!

You grew up in the Lake District but much of your photography is of Scotland. Where does your love of or connection with Scotland come from?

One of my first trips to Scotland was shortly after I bought my first car, my friend and I drove to Fort William for a week of walking and climbing the hills of Glen Coe, I distinctly remember my first sight of Buachaille Etive Mor rearing up like a huge pyramidal monolith from the blanket of Rannoch Moor, pretty inspirational stuff and perhaps another life defining moment. Over the years we'd make fairly regular visits to the Highlands for the fix of getting big hills under our boots, the Scottish hills offer a rugged and remoteness that the Lakes or even Wales can't match. I'm drawn to the harshness and solitary nature these hills are capable of providing, there are many places where you can stand on a summit and not see any signs of civilisation in any direction, a fulfilling and enhancing experience that is quite hard to come by.

More recently, four years ago, I had the chance to work in Aberdeen with a fortnightly commute home; this coincided with me getting more proficient with my then Nikon D200, filters and tripod. I found it convenient on occasion to get a spare day or two on my commute to detour via Skye or Torridon and spend a bit more time walking; this is really where my passion for photographing took off as I could combine the two pastimes together.

Could you tell us a little about the cameras and lenses you typically take on a trip and how you came to choose them?

My current camera is a trusty Nikon D300, a little hard worn but still performing brilliantly. I find it a great compromise between weight, mechanical construction and sealing, performance and operability. I use three Sigma lenses from 10mm to 200mm, the

“...I WAS INTRODUCED TO THE FELS AROUND AGE 11 WHEN MY OLDER BROTHER THOUGHT IT WOULD BE ENTERTAINING TO TAKE ME UP BLENCATHRA VIA SHARP EDGE ON A WINDY AND ICY WINTER'S DAY, A LIFE DEFINING MOMENT AND I'VE NEVER LOOKED BACK SINCE..”

17-70mm being my default lens and producing probably 80% of my images. I only use the 10-20mm in limited and last resort situations as I find it has a few odd effects but has been essential for a few mountain scenes that dictated its use. I hardly ever use my 70-200mm as it is too heavy to carry in the hills, has a scratch and the focus motor is broken, I should get shot really and repair or replace it. I use a Heliopan polariser, Lee and Hitech filters much preferring to use ND grads rather than HDR which for me doesn't produce the results I desire for various reasons.

I'm bought into the Nikon system and way of things stemming from the D40 Christmas present. I have to say that Nikon had a better marketing program at the time of my purchase, they were actively advertising in the magazines I was reading at the time so it was them that I plumed for and I have to say am very content with my present gear with no desire to change or even upgrade.

I believe you are working on a photographic project, can you tell us about this?

It's a bit of a labour of love I have to say. A couple of years ago whilst my passion for photographing the mountains of Scotland was increasing, I became inquisitive as to what actually are the finest mountains in the Highlands. I started a lot of research gathering many different opinions and information from a fairly wide range of people who either use or admire the hills but mainly from other walkers and drawing on my own experience. I then developed a list, a list in flux I have to say as opinions are so subjective that I keep adding or subtracting depending on who I listen to or how I feel. I then embarked on trying to photograph the mountains on my list, it has taken me a couple of years to photograph 70 odd of them so far and I have around a dozen left to do which as usual are the hardest and most frustrating to accomplish.

This process though has given me great reason to explore parts of Scotland that I probably wouldn't have thought to go to before and it is a constant source of enthusiasm and has given me plenty of focus and direction in my photography, sometimes detrimental to taking an other type of photograph though occasionally. I'm absolutely committed to finishing it, to the point where I hardly take the camera out of the bag to photograph anything else, I can even drive past Buachaille Etive Mor these days on a frosty winter morning at sunrise and not even have a pang to stop and photograph the waterfall, I already have my image and am solely focused on the ones I require. I may allow myself to go back there and photograph it again though once I'm finished..!!

The ultimate goal though for my collection of photographs is to produce a book describing the most appealing, iconic and photogenic mountains that are in Scotland. I'm in the process of proposing my idea to various publishers and keeping my fingers crossed I may be given the opportunity to see my project to publication.

Actually, I have to say that I have probably had as much enjoyment doing the research and planning of the images that I have wanted to capture for each subject as much as actually climbing the hills and taking the images. The learning process has been exciting, discovering that there are more to the obvious mountains that most of us know. Discovering hidden gems such as Ben Aden in the heart of Knoydart, understanding what its like to walk and photograph a whole range such as the Mamores in a day and the lone overnight camps high on the hills. It's also given me more reason to pore over maps and guide books with the ability to switch off from the latest soap opera that the family are watching.

“...I BECAME INQUISITIVE AS TO WHAT ACTUALLY ARE THE FINEST MOUNTAINS IN THE HIGHLANDS. I STARTED A LOT OF RESEARCH GATHERING MANY DIFFERENT OPINIONS AND INFORMATION FROM A FAIRLY WIDE RANGE OF PEOPLE WHO EITHER USE OR ADMIRE THE HILLS BUT MAINLY FROM OTHER WALKERS AND DRAWING ON MY OWN EXPERIENCE.”



“...THE LIGHT HALF AN HOUR BEFORE SUNRISE WAS SOFT AND SUBTLE WHICH GENTLY ACCENTUATED EACH SLIGHT CONTOUR. AS I STOOD THERE IN THE -10 C TEMPERATURE I COULD HAVE STOPPED TIME AND JUST SAVOURED THIS MOMENT FOR AGES.”

Tell me what your favourite three photographs are and a little bit about them.

My current three favourite images are ones that I have taken specifically for my book.

North Glen Shiel Ridge

This image has some simple aesthetic appeal for me, the Glen Shiel Ridge leading off to the right as the main subject, backed by the opposite mountains in a typical winter scene but this isn't the main reason why I like this image so much.

This was my third attempt at this image as previous tries hadn't materialised in favourable weather conditions but this one met my expectations so it does have some appeal purely from a satisfaction point of view that I captured an image that I had pre-visualised.

However, it's mainly an image that provides me with some distinct memories of a fabulous and quite rare experience. There had been heavy snow overnight and a harsh frost which provided a crust on the fresh snow surface which made a fabulous crunching sound that shot the otherwise eerie silence. The light half an hour before sunrise was soft and subtle which gently accentuated each slight contour. As I stood there in the -10 C temperature I could have stopped time and just savoured this moment for ages. I may not have actually portrayed this atmosphere or how I felt very well with this image and there might not be any particular solid compositional or interesting features in it but it is simply one of them images that transports me back to a wonderful 15 minutes or so where I was literally on a mountain high.

Solace in Silence

I like this image for two main reasons; firstly it fulfils my desire I had to simply capture the Corrag Bhuidhe ridge of An Teallach in favourable light. I hadn't seen this image from the summit of Sgurr Fiona before even after all my research but I knew from my study and reading accounts of the scramble over it that it must be worth photographing, again my expectation was satisfactorily met. Perhaps this image demonstrates a bit of my hunter/collector side where I want to show viewers where I have been and what the view is like from this particular location, it was certainly an effort to gain it but more overriding is my desire to show quite a spectacular scene, well for me anyway.

The second reason is perhaps hinted at in the title. I had orchestrated this trip to be at this location for sunset; I had pitched my tent in the afternoon and now had time alone on the summit waiting to take this picture. I had chance of a few minutes to just sit and absorb my circumstance and environment; I was alone close to darkness on the summit of a remote mountain surrounded by inspiring scenery in every direction. This was another life enhancing moment and a wonderful experience all round, it invigorates me when I place myself in these situations and there are many similarities with my personality in this image.

However, once again, I don't know if viewers will get this message and it's not really my intention to try and portray these nuances but if you do get more than just the details of the scene then it is a bonus I guess.





Buachaille Etive Beag (previous page)

I think this image just simply pleases me greatly for its aesthetics, mountains in winter with a quite fabulous sunrise. It was another location that was planned and pre-visualised for many months before I got the opportunity to attempt it. I'm essentially a recorder of scenes, I like to describe and inform the viewer with straightforward information of a subject. There isn't much room for abstraction or mystery in my images, I usually cram in as much visual data as possible and there isn't much left for the imagination in them, Tim will go and choose other images that may contradict me now probably!

It's a bit of an unusual view of Buachaille Etive Beag and I think makes a reasonable attempt at something alternative of it, the usual view of it is from Glen Etive or from the entrance to Glen Coe but it usually gets overlooked in favour of its big brother. It wasn't the sole reason why I climbed to this point though as Bidean nam Bain was my first priority which is just out of shot and bagged along with this. These are in essence the type of shots that I'm most proud of and if I could produce just a few of these each winter I'd be very happy as I think they sum up my relationship with the mountains.

When you are 'in the field', what is your usual workflow? i.e. How do you find a picture? Do you take sketch shots and then go back to a choice spot and wait for light? etc.

I have two very distinct phases for my planned shots, the research and planning stage which can be up to a year or so from conception of an image to capture. Typically I'll decide on a mountain to photograph based on obvious reasons such as Ben Nevis having a terrific crag and being the highest or more subtle reasons such as Ben Lomond having an association with the loch and its popularity with many folk from Scotland's central belt, both worthy of photographing. I will then work out how best to photograph them or concentrate on a particular feature that

identifies them, this will be the part where I pore over my maps and ignore the family for hours on end. I will write down the season, angle of Sun and time of day etc to maximise my chances of showing the subject of at its best. I have a methodical spreadsheet for all this information; being the Engineer in me I'm afraid.

I then move to the next phase where I make a trip to attempt the shots and where I am at the mercy of the weather but I have become quite adept at predicting what will happen, the weather is usually the deciding factor whether I meet my expectations or not, if I don't then I make return visits.

I don't take sketch shots but I have very strong pre-visualised images in my head of what I want the image to turn out like even if I haven't seen a previous image or been to the location before, I build this up from contours of the map, I know, I should have done something a bit more funky in my youth!

However, I'm not always robotic and do act spontaneously when chances arise, 'Schiehallion' and 'Leave the light on for me' are good examples of being somewhere for another reason but taking advantage of an opportunity.

Once on location I don't think too much about composition and shoot more on what instinctively looks right to my eye through the viewfinder, I'm not trained and don't read much theory relying more on my years in the hills and what feels right or makes a pretty view.

Light is not a driving factor for making an image either, I prioritise the subject first then hope that the light is complimentary for the composition I have chosen, although it has to be said that if the light isn't obviously right then I will usually return.

"I DON'T TAKE SKETCH SHOTS BUT I HAVE VERY STRONG PRE-VISUALISED IMAGES IN MY HEAD OF WHAT I WANT THE IMAGE TO TURN OUT LIKE EVEN IF I HAVEN'T SEEN A PREVIOUS IMAGE OR BEEN TO THE LOCATION BEFORE, I BUILD THIS UP FROM CONTOURS OF THE MAP..."

Do you have any desire to put your photography on a professional level (i.e. make some or all of your living from it)?

No not really, I'm very lucky to be employed in an interesting and satisfying industry that pays well so it would be quite a hard decision to change to a different career.

I obviously want to get my book published which isn't from a financial desire but certainly more from a recognition and ability to share places perspective. I have though been fortunate to do well in a few competitions and that is very gratifying. I'm a member of an international curated gallery which displays my images of Scotland and the Lakes to a wider audience other than UK based and I have developed an appreciation and following there.

What sorts of things do you think might challenge you in the future or do you have any photographs or styles that you want to investigate? Where do you see your photography going in terms of subject and style?

At present the only challenges are my levels of enthusiasm and desire to get to the locations that I have set myself, some are physically quite hard, time consuming and at a sacrifice being away from my family, they are getting harder as well, should have taught me not to pluck the champagne images first!

I don't have any real desires to try different styles or approaches, I am quite limited in what I like in my photography and don't have any real desires to photograph other than mountains at the minute, I have a macro lens collecting dust that should get used more often in the garden but I've found it even harder to get a decent macro shot than trekking all weekend for one.

Even though there is a lifetime of subject matter in Scotland I'd probably like to do the Lake District justice with a similar approach to what I am doing now.

To illustrate how dead set I am though, I spent an all paid three week trip to New Zealand for work but didn't even bother to wiz down to the Alps and have a ganders there, shocking for a landscaper.

Who do you think we should feature as our next photographer?

Ooh, a difficult question as I don't really know too many and if I am being totally honest don't draw too much inspiration from other photographers as much as subjects. I'm also a bit limited to photographers that shoot the things that I'm interested in; I am though a big fan of Colin Prior's panoramic mountain scenes so I'd suggest Colin Prior.

Alan Gordon provided all the images for 'The Scottish Mountains' book. Another source of inspiration with images that were taken through the eyes of someone who obviously spent a lot of time in the hills, I know nothing about him though so that would be interesting for me.

See more of John's portfolio on the following pages

A big thank you to John for this interview and if you want to see more of his photography online you can visit

<http://www.viewlakeland.com/>

or see more of his images at

<http://1x.com/artist/JohnParminter>

on landscape

Discuss John's work

.....
www.onlandscape.co.uk/2012/02/featured-photographer-john-parminter/
.....

PORTFOLIO

JOHN PARMINTER

















An Introduction to

BLACK AND WHITE

FOR COLOUR PHOTOGRAPHERS

by Tim Parkin



I've been asked by a couple of people to write some notes about black and white conversions and although I may not be the expert in this area, I thought it would be a good one to tackle and hopefully get some feedback from some people with more experience than me.

- 1) What to photograph
- 2) Preparing the file for conversion
- 3) Converting the colour file to black and white
- 4) Post processing

Most articles and books I have read have spent the most amount of time on step two but I feel that one of the most important steps is step three. A simple straight conversion of a colour file to black and white, even with the use of colour filters and grain simulation, etc. will rarely lead to a fully satisfying result. Anyway – back to that in a moment, let's take a look at step one.

What to photograph

I'm not an expert black and white photographer and don't publish many of my black and white photographs so anything I say in here will be observations and opinions only.

From what I have seen of successful black and white pictures, the following aspects are important.

- 1) **Broad tonal structure** – A picture that has areas of broad and consistent tonal structure offer a good opportunity. This typically means avoiding complex contrasty textures and looking for pictures that have low local contrast but broad global contrast. e.g. mist works well because it smooths out local contrast. The sea, sky and snow are also great elements for providing areas of low local contrast (as is architecture)
- 2) **Overall high or low key** – working within a small tonal scale allows you to play with texture and gradation of tone. Look at some of John Blakemore's work for great examples of this type of work.
- 3) **Bold shapes or structures** – Think Michael Kenna and his ability to 'extract' the simple from the landscape.

As a colour photographer nearly all of my good colour photographs make pretty bad black and white photographs. I rely on subtle tonal and colour differences to create my compositions and these things tend not to work in a monochrome photograph. In the process of writing this article I've tried converting many images from my portfolio and only a few work at all. The only shot that I have published, and taken, as black and white have been a photograph of Holy Island which works because of its very broad polarity of shading

There are a few photographs that may work as conversions and I'll be looking at these in the next section. One of these is a photograph of a hawthorn (I think) in the mist, which works, well, because of the mist – the great gift to photographers of all sorts. It has enough tonal structure with the bright flowers and mist and with darker rocks and the darker rocks and green leaves form an overall darker structure.

The other is a detail of some geology in Glencoe which has enough shape and shading to work besides its colour.





More complex pictures can work but they work best when the colour texture isn't playing a major part.

For instance, this photograph of ferns in the Taynish oakwoods in Kintyre has a consistent colour and it is the shading within this colour that makes the subject work. This shading comes across in a black and white conversion just as well (here using a green filter to enhance green contrast). The final step here was some simple rebalancing of tones around the edge and the centre.



PREPARING THE FILE FOR CONVERSION TO BLACK AND WHITE

Here I'm going to suggest that we create a file that is quite flat and natural looking, we don't need dramatic amounts of saturation.. What we need is a fairly straight looking file with tones from black to white. Now this isn't a 'law', you can start with any looking file you like and I'll come to low key and high key pictures later but I think this allows you a good flat starting point. This will allow use to derive an initial black and white file which is the equivalent of a good negative – which as we know is only a starting point in itself.

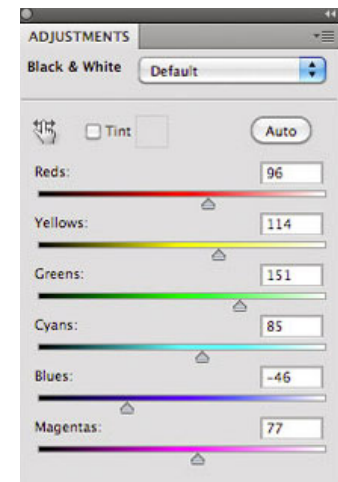
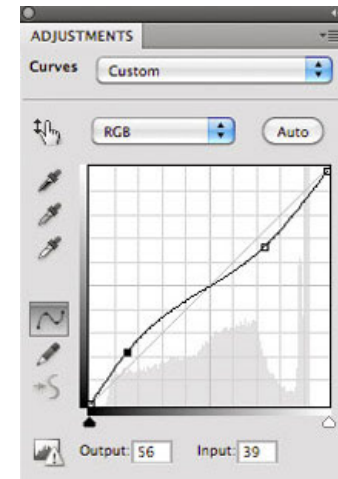


I would also suggest that any noise reduction is applied at this point, as should be any pre-sharpening. This isn't a tutorial on either of these subjects but I know I have had great success with Imagenomic's Noiseware and Topaz Denoise for noise reduction and Photokit Sharpener for sharpening. The latter transformed my sharpening approach and will probably be a good topic of discussion in itself. Anyway – hopefully we'll have a file not unlike the one on the left. (I'm using the Hawthorn tree photograph for this example).

My first task is to create a lower contrast version (after all the original here was velvia, one of the highest contrast films going). I do this by applying a reverse S curve as shown to the right.

This reduces contrast – ensuring we don't have any really dark blacks or really light whites. This also gives us a little headroom to play with when boosting and reducing the brightness of different colours.

I've used the photoshop black and white converter on this image but the approach is the same for most tools – we're lightening or darkening colours in order to create the effect we desire. In this images case, I've lightened the greens to provide some nice separation and we've darkened the blues to create contrast in the background (The background tending towards blue because of the rain. Rain again!! Wonderful stuff!).





“...JOE CORNISH HAS A GRADUATED YELLOW TO RED FILTER TO ALLOW HIM TO PLACE THE RED FILTER OVER A SKY AND THE YELLOW OVER THE GROUND – GREAT FOR EMPHASISING THE BOLD SKIES WITHOUT OVER FILTERING FOREGROUNDS..”

This isn't a particularly exciting file but it gives us some nice material to work with. One thing I noticed with this file is that I didn't like the dark path in the background and so I added a little 'trick' adjustment layer that shifts the hue of that particular area. I could have played with the brightness of just the path but instead I used the hue/saturation tool and selected the blues and shifted the hue towards greens. Since greens are being lightened by my conversion, the path becomes more defined.

Obviously you need to put this adjustment layer below the black and white conversion layer. There is nothing stopping you making two different black and white conversions and blending between them if you like. In fact Joe Cornish has a graduated yellow to red filter to allow him to place the red filter over a sky and the yellow over the ground – great for emphasising the bold skies without over filtering foregrounds. With photoshop we can blend all sorts of different conversions, red filters for the sky, green for foreground etc..

The geology example was even simpler – I increased the brightness in the reds and yellows a little and decreased the brightness in the cyans and blues – this choice informed by looking at the tones in the initial picture, namely the fact that the blue/cyan formed the 'canvas' for the colours of the rocks.

The fern picture was prepared in Lightroom and you can see the initial conversion process on the next page. The main influencing parameters are the increase in green brightness and the decrease in aqua/blue brightness. This will typically help with most foliage based pictures as the variation in greens are from a yellowy green to an aqua/cyan green. By brightening one end and darkening the other, we increase the contrast in the foliage areas. I could have increase the yellow a little more but didn't want to create too much contrast and there was quite a bit of yellow in the background which I didn't want to lighten up too much – I could have addressed this with a 'blended conversion', i.e. create two layers in photoshop, one with a green/yellow boost and another with just a green boost and used the 'just green boost' as the background. However, I wanted to convert this in lightroom so...



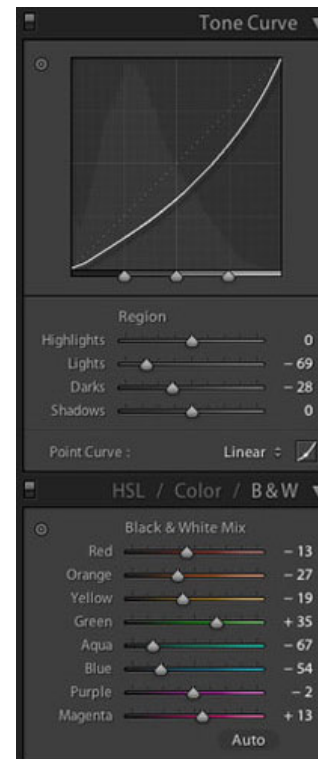
Final image



Colour original



Initial Lightroom conversion



POST PROCESSING

In my mind, this is where the real magic of black and white comes and it's something that none of the 'plugins' can help you with (although they may help with burning the edges in a little).

The level of processing that has historically been applied to black and white photographs will probably surprise most people. The most well known example of this process is probably 'Moonlight over Hernandez' by Ansel Adams. Ansel took this as a quick snapshot (as quick as you can with a 10x8 camera) and guessed the exposure. You can read more about the making of this iconic image and see Ansel's detailed printing steps on the excellent Notes on Photographs website.

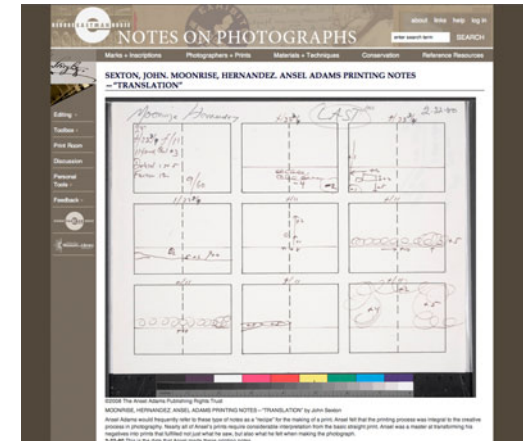
As you will see, quite dramatic changes including the bold move of dodging out the top clouds completely. He also used some intensifier on the actual negative in later years to boost the 'town' area and make it easier to print.

The notes show where he darkened and lightened areas, where negative numbers are lightening and positive numbers are darkening. Ansel has transformed the image from something that looks pretty good into something quite dramatic.

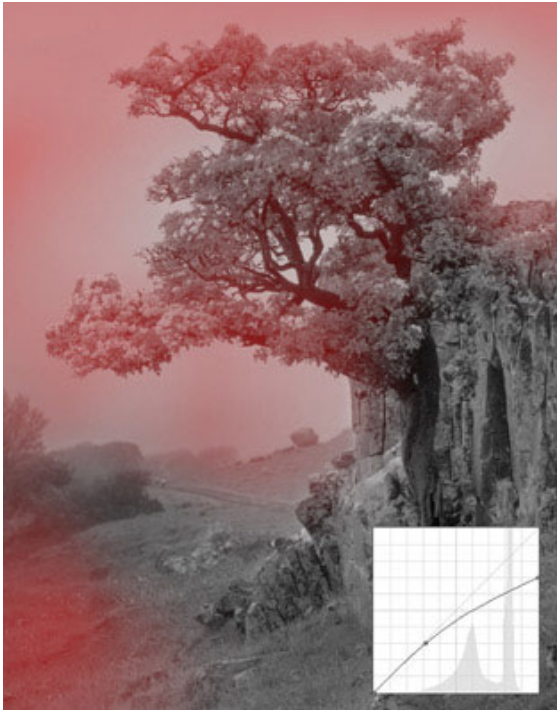
Your changes don't have to be this dramatic, quite often smaller changes will get you where you want to be (or even no changes at all on occasion!).

On the next few pages we will look at the Hawthorn tree example from before.

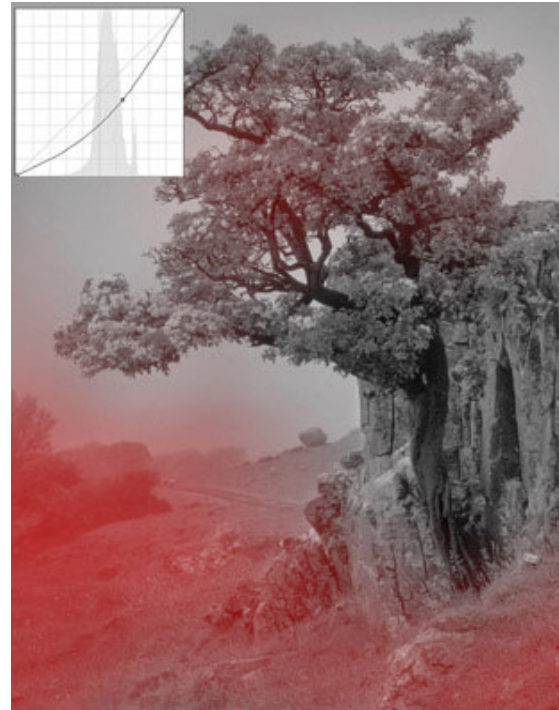
“...THE LEVEL OF PROCESSING THAT HAS HISTORICALLY BEEN APPLIED TO BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHS WILL PROBABLY SURPRISE MOST PEOPLE”



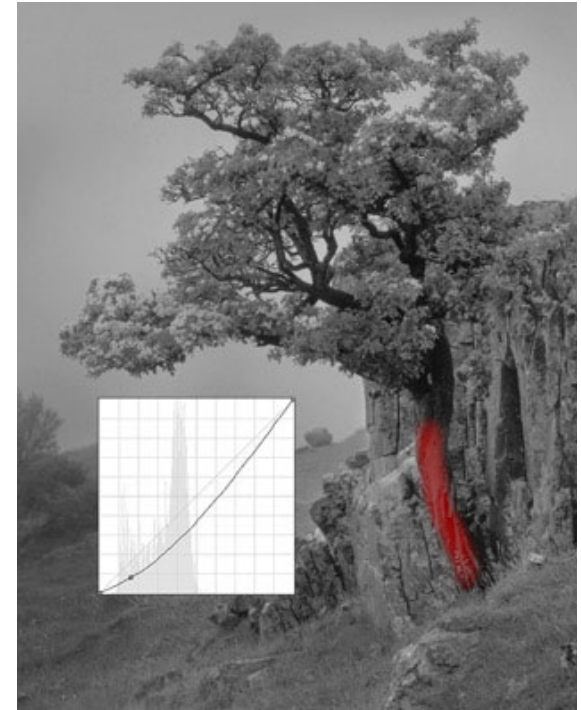
Click on the images to go to the Notes on Photography website



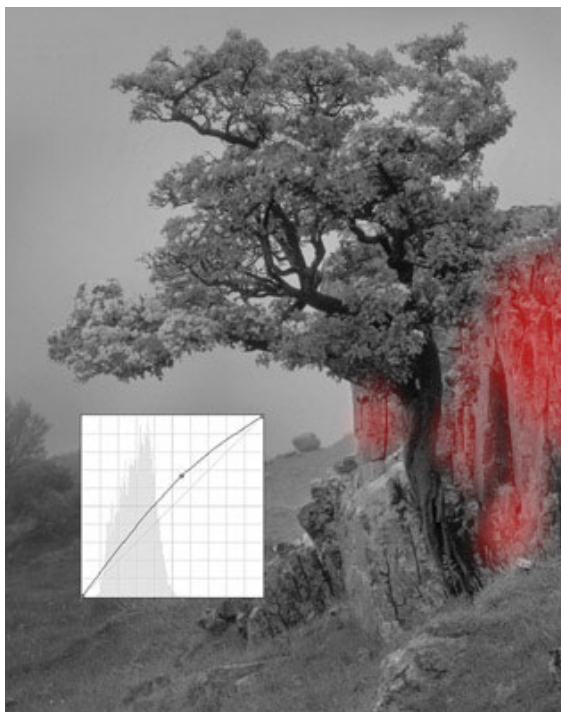
The first step was to darken the sky and burning in the edges slightly, this gives a bit more texture in the sky and holds a little interest in the picture. I also dodged in the bottom left to create a bit of a gradient in the corner grasses. Note that I'm not affecting the shadows with my curves here, just bringing the highlights and mid-tones down.



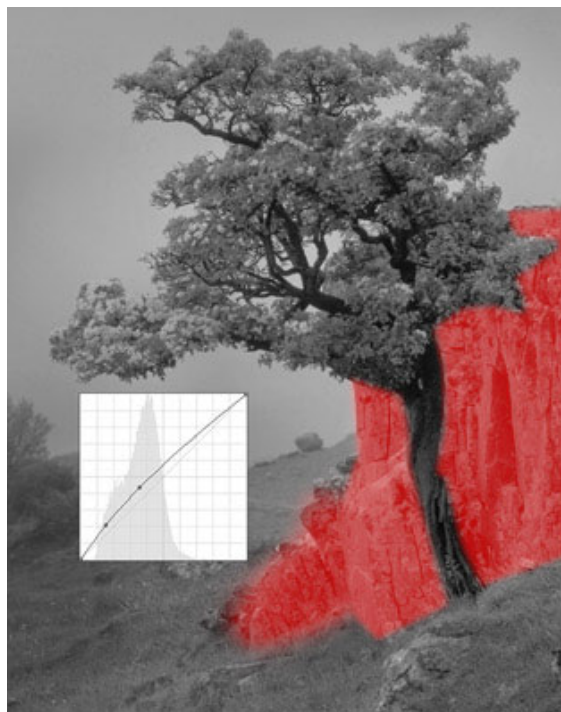
I'm now dodging the ground areas which were quite bright in the original. This creates some texture and balances the tones between the sky and the tree areas.



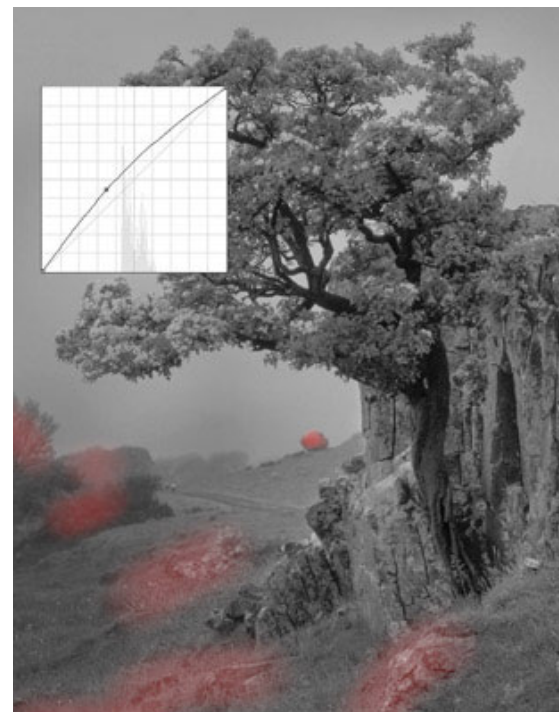
Here I wanted to create a consistent tone in the whole of the tree trunk to make it stand out from the wall better. I've graduated a selection down the trunk and then reduced the exposure using a curve. My aim here is to simplify the picture and to create more consistent areas of tone. This is a subtle change but the sum of a few subtle changes can make a big effect.



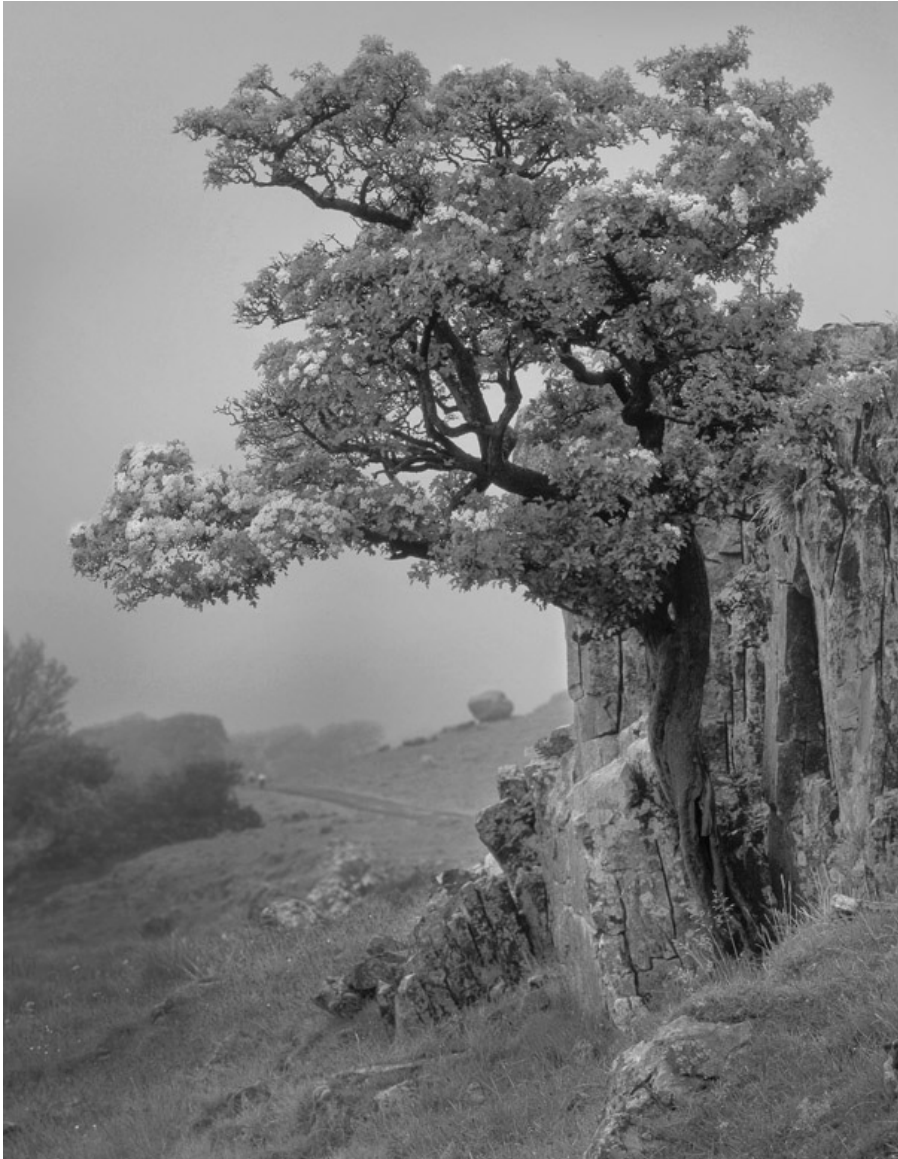
I'm lightening up the areas of the wall that were a little too dark. The goal here is to create a more consistent tone for the whole wall because originally the shadowy areas were very dark. Lightening these provides a continuity of tone across the wall area.



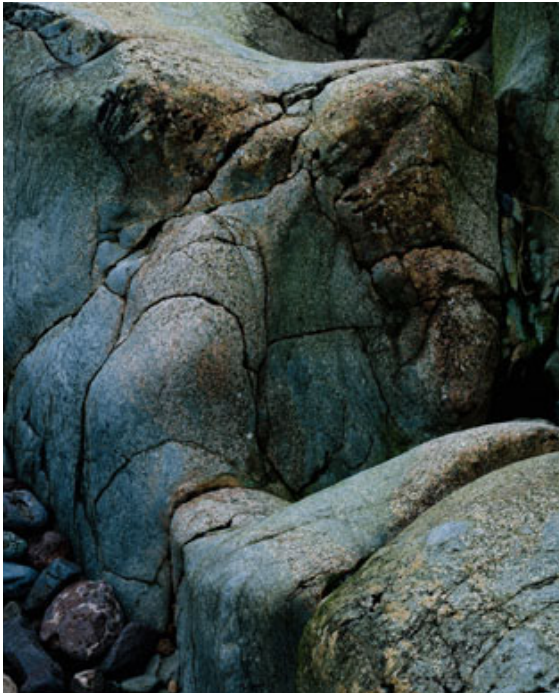
Now that the wall is balanced overall, I'm going to lighten the whole of the wall area to give it a tone slightly lighter than the grasses. This helps the tree trunk to stand out (especially as we have made the trunk an overall darker shade earlier).



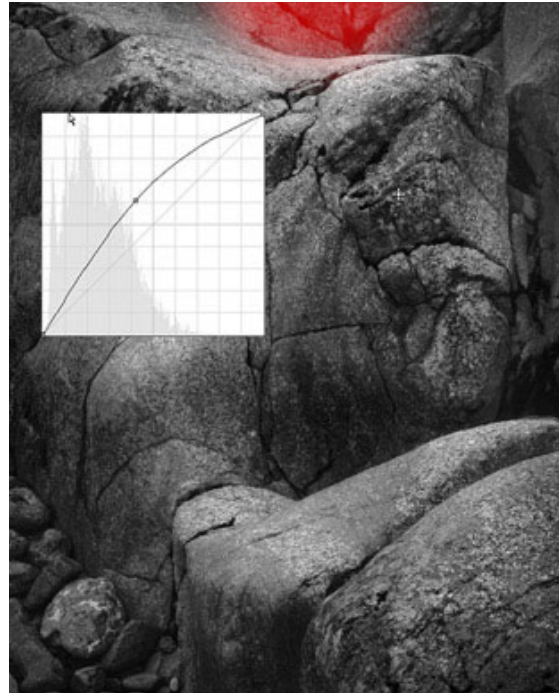
My last step was to dodge some areas to create a little more broad tonal texture in the grasses and the bushes in the background and also to create a little more shape in the erratic. This creates a little more tonal interest to keep your eye in the picture.



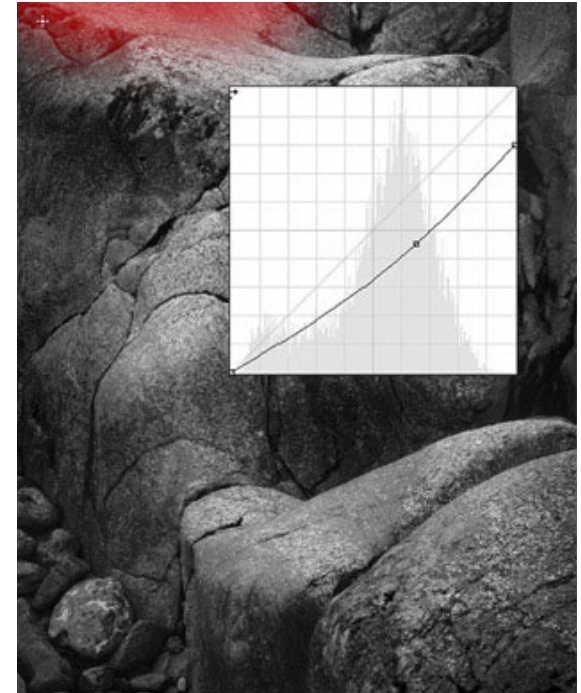
And here is the final image.. I did make one more change and that was to use a fine brush dodging tool to dodge the highlights in the blossoms just to help them stand out a little. I paid attention to a consistent direction of light so I applied most of the dodging to the top and left edges of each cluster of blossom. I hope the final photograph was worth the effort.



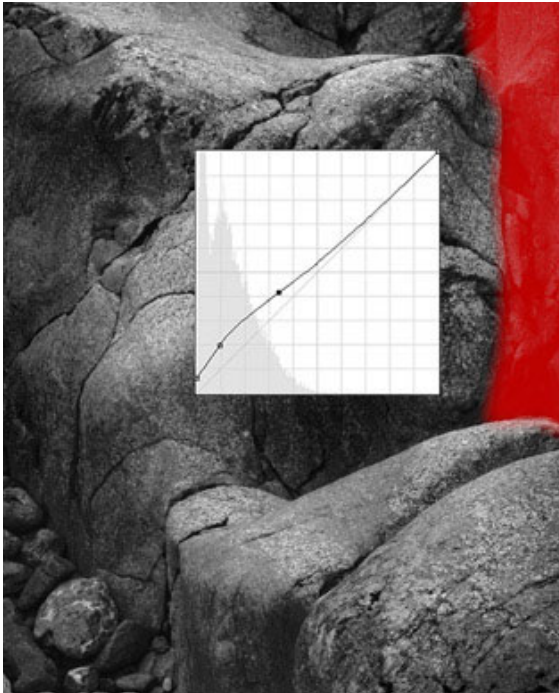
The following geology example was easier in some ways but I was paying more attention to enhancing the consistent tonal graduations in the print. Here were my steps.



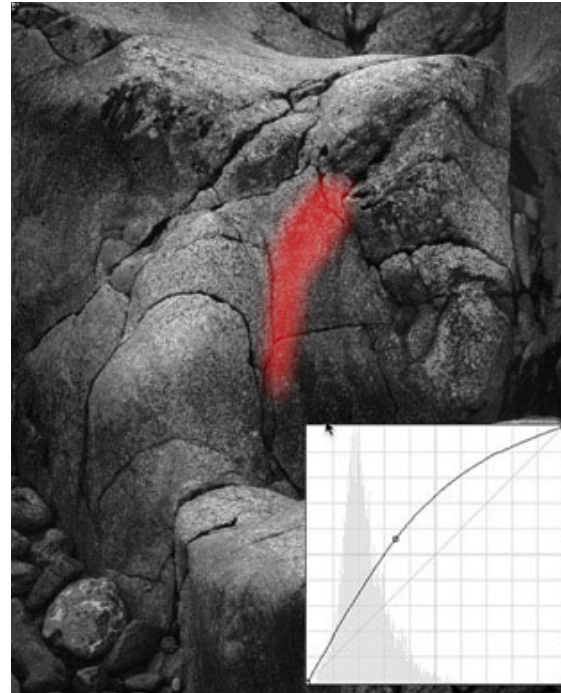
My first step was to work on the area at the top of the image, lightening the dark area here and then...



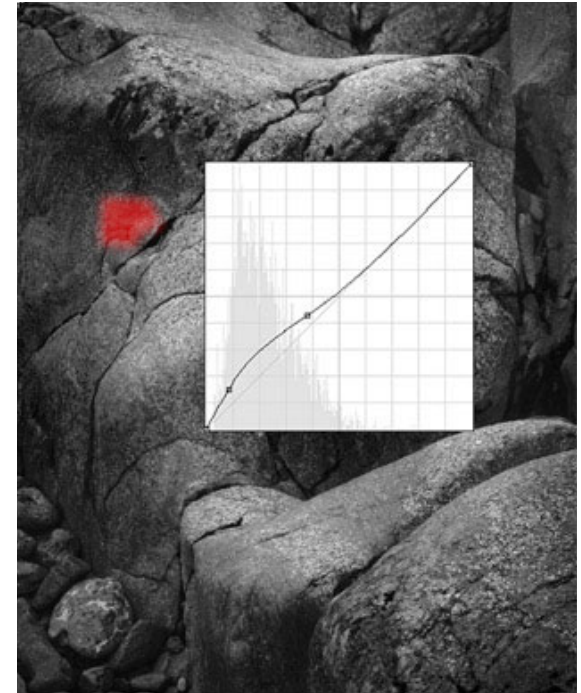
.. darkening this corner and finally ...



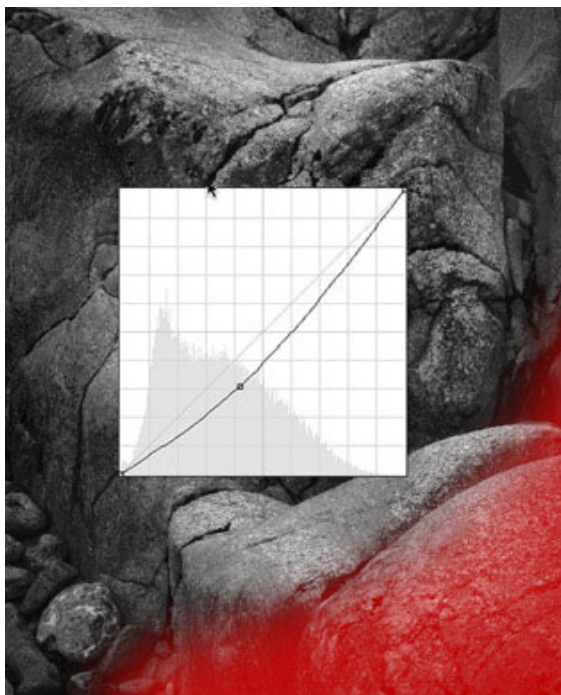
.. lifting the very dark shadow on the right hand side of the picture (including lifting the 0,0,0 black up) but if you note on the curve, I've left the midtones and highlights alone. This creates a more consistent tone around the top edge of the picture, not drawing attention and allowing the pointy bit in the top right to sit on a consistent background. to that end



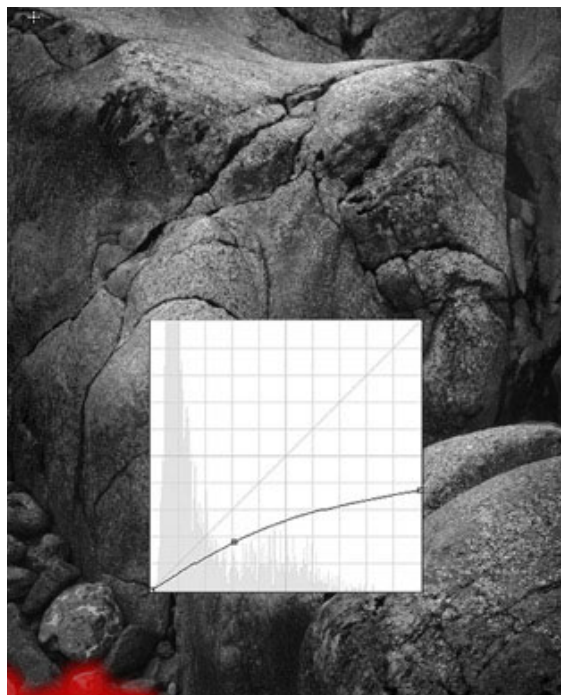
The next two steps are aimed at smoothing out a couple of the areas that 'stand out'. This first is just a darker band of rock that made a little bit too much of an obvious 'edge' which I wanted to smooth out.



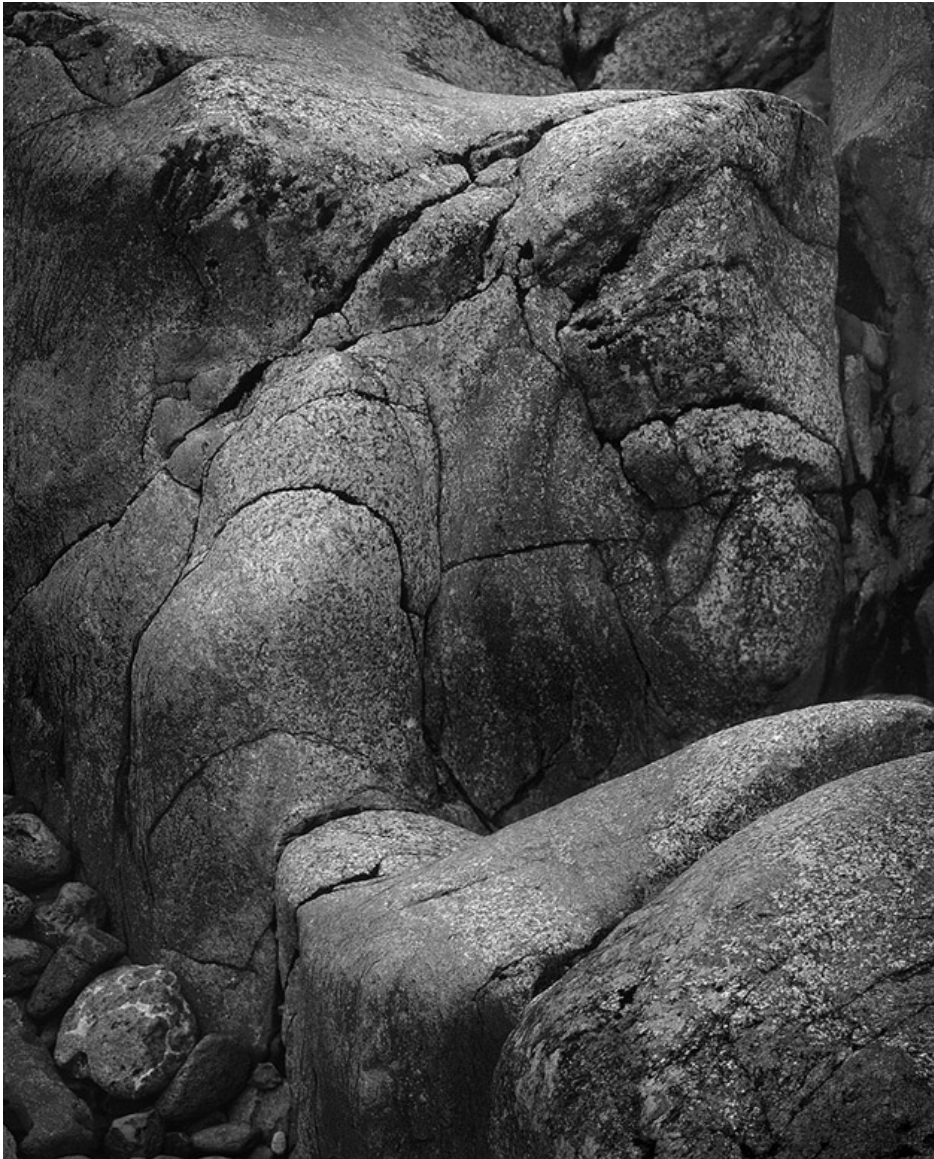
And this was to lift the brightness of a dimple in the rock.



A bit burning the corner in helps to keep the attention in (note that I don't burn in all of the edges with a simple vignette. Most pictures benefit from working the edges on a custom basis like this – it makes the burned edges less obvious also),



At last, there were a few quite bright stones in the bottom left of the picture that I wanted to subdue. Again, working in black and white allows me to make quite drastic curve changes without making things look too 'wrong'.



The final result...

If you want to take a look at a few more real world examples from someone I consider to be one of the best black and white photographers, have a look at the technique page of Rolfe Horn's website. Also, take a look around some of his photographs in general as there is a lot of inspiration to be had.

Here are a few other black and white photographers that float my particular boat - Michael Levin, Beth Dow, Rolfe Horn, Michael Kenna, Bill Schwab – not an exhaustive list, please add links to any that you think are exceptional..

I'll hopefully continue talking about Black and White in future posts, addressing some of the conversion plugins such as Exposure or Silver EFX.

Links

Rolfe Horn - www.f45.com/html/tech/index.html

www.michaellevin.ca/

www.bethdow.com/portfolios.html

www.michaelkenna.net/

www.billschwab.com/

on landscape

Discuss this article

www.onlandscape.co.uk/2011/05/an-introduction-to-black-and-white-for-colour-photographers/

BEATING THE BOUNDS



CHRIS TANCOCK

by Rob Hudson

Chris Tancock is perhaps best known in the landscape photography world for his colour Quiet Storm series for which he was highly commended in the very first Landscape Photographer of the Year competition in 2007. There is a double irony here, firstly because at least 99% of his work is black and white and secondly because he denies being a "landscape photographer" at all, preferring to label himself as a "rural documentary photographer." But don't be put off that this is not relevant to you as a landscape photographer, trust me there are some huge lessons to be learned from this man and his application of method and technique and although he pursues his own angle the work still deals with the things we can all find in the landscape around us. His work is poetic, magical and original and maybe shows a route to furthering the depth and meaning in all our work and surely that's a conundrum we all face from time to time. You may, though, have to stomach some blunt and candid criticism of the landscape genre from him before you see a route to the creative future, for it's only through criticism that we can move forward.

The Quiet Storm project represent only 12 images, although apparently ongoing he hasn't added to them for nearly two years. He should perhaps be better known for his other work, all of which is black and white; Wildwood which explores the way we see images through the exploration of animal like forms in ancient woodland, the Stones series which examines the relationship between man and his environment in closely framed images of stones and the changes wrought by nature over time and finally and perhaps most importantly the major project Beating the Bounds that has been three years in the making and has another year or two to completion. Simply subtitled "five fields, five years" it is a substantial body of work already and to my mind the most successful to date. In essence it is a journey through time in five fields that are completely unremarkable to the casual visitor and certainly your average landscape photographer would dismiss them without a second thought. But that was a deliberate choice, one that has forced him to confront the norms of composition and

subject and to weave together a series of images that represent the remarkable things that happen in such unremarkable fields, the passage of time and in the end his relationship with his chosen plot as it evolves throughout the project.

As we sat chatting in his kitchen, the table between us soon became strewn with his beautifully crafted prints and books representing his influences such as Fay Godwin's *Forbidden Land* and most often referred to was John Berger and Jan Mohr's *Another Way of Telling*. Other names that cropped up included people such as Josef Koudelka, the poets John Clare and Alice Oswald, the magic realist author Angela Carter, the naturalist Richard Maybe and the photographers Keith Carter and John Blakemore. They not only represented the breadth of his insight, but also his infectious passion for photography as he continually drew out complex ideas and strands while referring to them. I found the ideas inspirational and, as if I needed more, I was constantly reminded of the power and poetry of his work by the liberally displayed prints scattered around the walls of the room.

What do you think of the Landscape Photographer of the Year Competition? (Chris Tancock was highly commended in the very first one in 2007)

"Um, it's a very good commercial enterprise and that's all I feel about it really. I mean it's great for the people who run it and the amateurs who enter it but it shouldn't be called the Landscape Photographer of the Year. The thing about photography is that you can accidentally take a brilliant image. I often look at the winners website and they have one good image and I look at the rest and they're not as outstanding as the winning shot, a lot of them are just copies of other photographers and in exactly the same location. In America in the 30s when Kodak was really trying to push itself, all the beauty spots in America they had these plinths with footprints on them and it was a Kodak plinth, you stood on them, pointed your camera in the direction of the arrow and you had the "perfect shot!"



"HIS WORK IS POETIC, MAGICAL AND ORIGINAL AND MAYBE SHOWS A ROUTE TO FURTHERING THE DEPTH AND MEANING IN ALL OUR WORK AND SURELY THAT'S A CONUNDRUM WE ALL FACE FROM TIME TO TIME."



“I DON’T WANT TO HURT PEOPLE’S FEELINGS, BUT I DON’T LIKE BOULDERS IN THE FOREGROUND, SUNSETS IN THE BACKGROUND, DIAGONALS IN BETWEEN THEM, REPEATED AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN, HUNTING THE COUNTRYSIDE UNTIL YOU FIND THESE THINGS. WHAT DOES THAT TELL YOU ABOUT THE LANDSCAPE? NOTHING, IT TELLS YOU ABOUT COMPOSITION AND THE PHOTOGRAPHER, IT DOESN’T TELL YOU ANYTHING ABOUT THE LANDSCAPE, BUT THEY’RE COMMERCIALY VIABLE.”

“I keep waiting for there to be another brilliant landscape photographer, somebody like Fay Godwin or Bill Brandt or even Koudelka – his landscapes in Wales especially. Or Raymond Moore he influenced so many landscape photographers. Fay Godwin went on one [of his courses] when she was doing a cross over from portraiture. His work now looks old hat, because it’s what you see all the time, but for it’s time, you can see there’s a Koudelka feel to some or a Michael Kenna feel to this [pointing out images on his laptop], but this was done way before any of that, photographing things in the landscape that most amateurs would ignore. I’m always getting told off for leaving telegraph poles in, but they are there and they are wonderful and they won’t be there much longer.”

“I don’t want to hurt people’s feelings, but I don’t like boulders in the foreground, sunsets in the background, diagonals in between them, repeated again and again and again, hunting the countryside until you find these things. What does that tell you about the landscape? Nothing, it tells you about composition and the photographer, it doesn’t tell you anything about the landscape, but they’re commercially viable. They are very easily read images. People forget we read images on different levels and an image like that has the reading age of a 5 year old, it’s the equivalent of a Janet and John book. If you call it the Landscape Photo of the Year I wouldn’t have any problems with it, but to call it landscape photographer makes it sound like this photographer has done amazing things with landscape, but they’ve taken one good shot – it could have happened by accident. They might have one good photograph, they might have half a dozen, but that doesn’t make you a good photographer, especially if you have a digital camera. To me that’s the main difference between different sorts of photographers and what I call calligraphy photographers, which is definitely, what the LPY is about. It’s about good composition; it’s about crispness, all these things, that is calligraphy. What is that person telling me about landscape? What is he telling me that he feels about it? Forget the composition, forget the detail, what else

is there and I look at those and I don’t see anything else.”

So how did it affect you, being commended?

“Well it was the first year, I didn’t know what it was going to be about, I didn’t know what sort of people were going to enter. You know, the idea excited me a bit because even though I’m not a landscape photographer I thought there isn’t anything out there being done. I consider myself a rural photographer and I consider myself a documentary photographer who falls into fine art, I love the idea of mixing documentary and fine art together.”

“I was quite excited to start with, there are some lovely landscape photographers out there, nothing amazing, nothing that’s making me go “oh my god, I wish I could do that!” But there are some interesting people out there, they didn’t enter and that’s why I haven’t entered again, it’s not what I do. When I went to the winners exhibition my work was scattered about (which is understandable) I talked to people about how I’m using set locations and I use the same locations again and again and again, and I’ve only got 12 places I go to [for his colour Quiet Storm series] and it’s about photographing storms, it’s not about the landscape. If I lived in the city they would be cityscapes. The storms tend to happen on the beaches because there’s big open sky to show the storm. I did shoot myself in the foot in a way and that project has been a big learning curve for me. I decided in the beginning to choose a dozen locations so that hopefully I get multiple storms in the same place making the landscape look different, I also wanted to use really simple compositions, thinking that if the composition was really simple people wouldn’t focus on the landscape and it didn’t work, it backfired.”

Do you think you’re now known for those colour images?

“Well I am, I’ve got 12 colour photographs and the rest is all B&W, more than 98% over 30 years of photography is B&W. I don’t see the point of colour. Just because a photograph can do colour, can do 3D, can do movement, it doesn’t mean we have to use it. For me to do a 3D image there would have to be a really

“I KEEP WAITING FOR THERE TO BE ANOTHER BRILLIANT LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHER, SOMEBODY LIKE FAY GODWIN OR BILL BRANDT OR EVEN KOUDELKA...”





“THE BIGGEST THING TO REMEMBER ABOUT PHOTOGRAPHY IS TO REMEMBER A PHOTOGRAPH, NEVER, EVER, EVER, EVER SHOWS YOU REALITY.”

good reason for that, for me to do a motion picture there would have to be a really good reason, for me to do colour there has to be something really important about it to my story.”

“The idea with the storms was that I’d seen two or three storms in the middle of the day, that looked like sunsets, and I thought wow this is amazing! So I started to photograph storms, where through exactly the same reason as sunsets, filtering out light, created these really weird colours, so it had to be colour. I didn’t want other aspects entering into it, so that’s why I chose to use exactly the same camera, exactly the same location and exactly the same simple composition each time, I was trying to eliminate everything else. It didn’t work out quite the way I wanted, but then things don’t always work, you know I wish they did!”

“The biggest thing to remember about photography is to remember a photograph, never, ever, ever, ever shows you reality. It’s one of the reasons I’m not keen on landscape photography (this is going to sound terrible, but I’m not) is that people think they are showing reality, or they are trying to. They want it sharp and they want the tonal range to be like the eye sees, I can’t be bothered with that. I talk to so many [landscape photographers] and they say that is how the eye sees and I say yes, but the eye sees movement, they say photography doesn’t show movement and I say yes it does. What’s film? One still after another still after another showing you the illusion of movement, photography is an illusion.” ***CT reaches for a print, pointing and continues:*** “This doesn’t exist. What are we looking at here? A piece of paper with ink on it, can you see the piece of paper with ink or can you see the picture? It’s an illusion, your brain does not look at the ink, it reads all these lines, tones, shapes and your brain recreates them into an image in your head, it doesn’t exist. It feels like they’ve forgotten what photography is. Photography is showing the world as a photograph, not showing the world as it is, it’s saying wow, I wonder what the world looks like as a photograph.”

“They seem to ignore 90% of what photography is and keep hold of that 10%, they focus on detail, on depth of field, tonal range and they think that’s the most important thing. When they want the colour to be exact they have these profiles, what’s wrong with your eyes? When I was in the darkroom, I’d produce test prints, and look at them and I’d say yes that’s good and I’d do it!”

“Photography for me (I’m quite old fashioned about this I suppose) is about juxtaposition, it’s about telling stories through images, it’s a documentary idea, the old fashioned idea of documentary, the John Berger idea, you selectively show people, it is about a body of work. I cannot for the life of me get excited about most individual images, because an individual image can tell you very little unless it’s extraordinarily good. Some of the best Cartier-Bresson can go beyond that, but they’re one in a million, or a great Atjet. There are people out there who’ve achieved those individual images. What most landscape photographers do I would call calligraphy, they produce pretty pictures and they use standardised techniques, so you have the thirds system with foreground interest and a strong diagonal and they hunt the countryside to find images that conform to some compositional ideal so they keep moving on until they find somewhere else that fits. For me that’s where it all falls down, you end up with these random images and nobody bothers, on the whole, reading the image. It’s a bit like having a poem written in calligraphy, you stand there and go wow. The funny thing is that this calligraphy has very little to do with the photographer, the calligraphy is also the technical side of photography, number of mega pix, quality of the printer etc. Composition is a bit like spelling, it’s no big deal. We all have to learn to write so that others can understand what we’re saying. It’s exactly the same in photography, we shouldn’t be praised over it, we don’t praise writers because they get their spellings right, so why do we praise photographers for doing good composition? I don’t understand it, it’s bizarre, it’s just a basic but important starting point.”

“PHOTOGRAPHY FOR ME (I’M QUITE OLD FASHIONED ABOUT THIS I SUPPOSE) IS ABOUT JUXTAPOSITION, IT’S ABOUT TELLING STORIES THROUGH IMAGE..”



“...A CAMERA DOESN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING AT, IT DOESN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT TO SAY AND HOW YOU WANT TO SAY IT, IT TAKES AVERAGES. I HATE AVERAGES!”

Is your choice of camera important to you?

“Think of a photographer like a carpenter. If I gave a carpenter a chisel, what could he make for me? Give him a saw and a chisel and a plane he starts to make something interesting. I've lost count of my cameras; I've got a large format, a little Leica, medium format, a pin-hole camera. At the moment on *Beating the Bounds*, I've got two or three of these little Olympus' [DSLR]. I like them because they take all my Leica lenses, whereas for the *Quiet Storm* project, I'm using an old Minolta 4.5mp because I don't want detail. For the new farm project, I'm using a 12mp camera. I've got my film cameras and I've got a large format. They all give you different looks, they are all different tools. You choose your tool for your job. The idea of having one camera, I don't understand it!

Cameras don't cost a lot anymore [second-hand], the crazy thing about buying the latest Canon or what ever is they're gonna have to replace it a year down the road because they've got to have the latest mega pixels or the latest features. I hate features on cameras, oh god I hate them! I take all my photographs on manual. I was going to say, I use manual focus but my eyesight is not what it was. So what I do is set up the camera on auto focus and then go to manual [to take the photograph]. I use the spot focus – that's another thing, why would anyone want to let the camera focus on anything it bloomin' well likes! Matrix focussing, what is that about? It's the same with the amount of light coming into the camera; I want to choose how much light comes into the camera because I want to show the world as I want it to look.

That's what photography is about. A camera doesn't understand what you're looking at, it doesn't know anything about what you want to say and how you want to say it, it takes averages. I hate averages! Focus, exposure and depth of field, they are the three basic things within photography and people don't want to be involved with them. They are what make your photographs yours, rather than the cameras. It's the same reason I don't like a lot of landscape photography because you can see the camera's taken the photograph for them."

Tell me about post processing, how has that changed over time?

"I photograph in RAW (at least in digital), with a film camera I have to make decisions; I have to decide what a photograph is going to look like. So if I wanted a warm tone image, I bought Kodak, if I wanted a cold Germanic image, I bought Agfa, if I wanted punchy bright coloured images I bought Fuji. They all had different dye saturations, different contrasts even; you choose your film to get your look. These days a RAW file collects so much information it's possible for me to have a little add on and as soon as the RAW file comes into Lightroom it gets converted to look like Fuji. So it means all your images are going to be standardised as they were when you bought film. Then I dodge and burn, for me (this is really personal) a photograph that hasn't been dodged and burned is a snapshot. I dodge and burn mainly to control how I want people to look at my photograph and to give a sense of depth and mystery and all the things that bring an image to life. Then when it came to printing in the past, you had a choice of papers to give you the look you wanted. Your developers would give you different tones, all these things would give you completely different looks. I was a Record Rapid man. Same with colour, the paper I loved, even though it was really expensive, was Cibachrome. So I've got my printer set up to put down exactly the same colour saturation as a Cibachrome print. All my colour

images are printed exactly the same, so any changes in the colours are to do with the reality of a moment in time."

So what about the B&Ws?

He uses post processing to dodge and burn and give them the tonal range that would have been achieved with "Record Rapid" paper, "Because I haven't got that option anymore, I have to do it myself, rather than have some chemical manufacturer do it for me. That is the great thing about digital photography – in the past I would dream of a film or a paper and unless I'd been a billionaire I couldn't have achieved it. Digital photography is not cheating, that's what photography has always done. A photograph is a chemical or now a digital process that alters the world from what it is into a photograph and to think of it as anything else is silly, really silly – I can't emphasize that enough – it's not a window onto the world, it's just not."

"So I'm processing my images to give them tone, I'm setting the contrast to get the contrast I would have got with the paper, if it's a digital shot I even put some grain back into it. I love grain and I hate the fact that a digital camera doesn't give you grain. Noise isn't the same, because grain clumps and works in a completely different way."

"I do everything by eye, so I drag out some old Cibachrome prints and the original slide and put it in the computer and play with it until the look is as close as possible. John Blakemore, darkroom wise, was my guru. I still use the techniques I learnt in the darkroom. Now, I like to use Photoshop sparingly as if I was back in the dark room but what I do love using it for is my initial test strips and for dodging and burning. They could do with somebody like John Blakemore or some old time darkroom photographer to say, "If you had this in Lightroom..." it'd be great. Although Lightroom now has 'dodge and burn' it feels nothing like working in the old darkroom, which is a shame. Whereas in Photoshop I'm more able to work as I did in the past. I would, for example, work with templates cut to shape."

"...A PHOTOGRAPH IS A CHEMICAL OR NOW A DIGITAL PROCESS THAT ALTERS THE WORLD FROM WHAT IT IS INTO A PHOTOGRAPH AND TO THINK OF IT AS ANYTHING ELSE IS SILLY, REALLY SILLY..."



“It’s a funny one because I love digital and film but with digital I can work on a five year project like *Beating the Bounds* and I can just get on with it, I haven’t got this mound of negatives. So it’s a bit like a writer who says I don’t need to use an old typewriter anymore, I can use a word processor, it doesn’t change what he writes, it’s just a tool. There are for sure limitations, but some of these shots in *Beating the Bounds* are digital, some are film. Digital photography is going to supplant film, the same way wet collodion isn’t about anymore.”

“On my *Wildwood* project it’s not about the wood, it’s about how we look at images. It’s about photo’s being nothing more than photo’s. We read an image and the thing is we make mistakes. What I was photographing in this image was a wolf” [see next page] “And when I put it out on display some people said, “it’s not a wolf, it’s a deer” and others, “I see a sheep with it’s wool falling off” others “I see a tarantula” and for the life of me I can’t see a tarantula. I had a young lad come who said, “I see your wolf, but I see a big ear and a nose and an eye and I see a rabbit.” It just went on and on people seeing more and more things, so this project is about how we see things. On a superficial level it’s the wood, I love the ambiguity of images, this project is about reading images and reading into them. It’s a slow project, I have to find all the things, most of my projects are slow. I work like Keith Carter does, I have my boxes and I just keep adding to them it can take years, but what’s the hurry. It’s about understanding, exploring photography, exploring the way you communicate, it’s not about wanting to produce pretty pictures that people will say “Oh that’s nice!”

“ I have none of the shots that I took from the first year of “*Beating the Bounds*” because that year was about getting to know what I wanted out of the project. I didn’t know how or what I was going to photograph in those fields. I have an idea, like the idea of *Beating the Bounds* about walking the same route, about photographing things that aren’t clichéd, beautiful things that other people may not look at. Hedges! I always wanted to photograph



“...WHAT I WAS PHOTOGRAPHING IN THIS IMAGE WAS A WOLF. AND WHEN I PUT IT OUT ON DISPLAY SOME PEOPLE SAID, “IT’S NOT A WOLF, IT’S A DEER” AND OTHERS, “I SEE A SHEEP WITH IT’S WOOL FALLING OFF” OTHERS “I SEE A TARANTULA...”

hedges but how do you photograph hedges? Most people don't even look at a hedge; don't even look at fields but as I walked those fields I got more ideas about looking over boundaries, to do with separation, with focusing on what's yours and what's not. It's also about the way a field looks as though nothing happens in it. After walking it for a year it really came home to me that the great thing about a field, unlike photographing in a city – photographing on the street is like photographing a second-hand on a clock, there's something happening all the time, photographing a field is like photographing the hour-hand, you know it's changing but you can't see it happening. You may have to wait weeks, months, years before something happens. Now I can walk up the field and photograph nothing because nothing happened, but you may go up on one day and a lot is happening. Maybe there'll be a change in the seasons and suddenly a lot happens."

"What I love as well is things you've looked at before a hundred times, that never caught your eye, will suddenly become really important and things you've been photographing for three years suddenly die away and you don't want to photograph them anymore. I love that idea of photographing over very long periods in one place. All my projects have been long periods, the shortest one I've done was a year and I felt that was too short and I don't think I'd do one for just a year again, it's not long enough! Five years is a good time, three years is the average, but of course you've got to have some work under your belt if you're waiting for five years for a body of work."

"It's important to mention that the things I say about photography, what I believe, I really don't expect other photographers to buy into it, I hope they don't because that would be boring! Finding your own way is the important thing."

Tancock has some fascinating ideas about how his images should be seen, or displayed.

"I think all pure photographers should be pushing the boundaries, photography is going through a very stale period at



the moment. It probably did every time there was a technological jump, like when we went from wet collodian to dry collodian or from plate to film. The impact of the technology just made everyone brain dead, so they weren't looking to do new things, then suddenly once they got used to it and it wasn't new anymore then they thought "Oh my god, what can we do with this?" How different is it to use a Leica from a plate camera? So I've got a digital camera, how is that different to when I was using 35mm and film? Doing this project [Beating the Bounds] is one of the experiments."

"The idea is to have a project that will have four to five hundred images at the end of the day. To be read, in the form of sentences. Images feeding off each other in a structured way, size is one way I am trying.

People think that an image can be any size, that it will make no difference, the main reason for it is a large image is powerful, a large image has impact, it's just the nature of the beast. Any image blown up large is amazing!"

"IT'S IMPORTANT TO MENTION THAT THE THINGS I SAY ABOUT PHOTOGRAPHY, WHAT I BELIEVE, I REALLY DON'T EXPECT OTHER PHOTOGRAPHERS TO BUY INTO IT, I HOPE THEY DON'T BECAUSE THAT WOULD BE BORING! FINDING YOUR OWN WAY IS THE IMPORTANT THING."

“My ideal way of seeing images is in a book, you sit down on your own and you look at it, you experience it. The largest I’ll go in an exhibition is 40x40cm, it’s a two person experience, I’m happy with that, just about. I’d much prefer they were smaller, but people want big images and the biggest problem with my work is that I don’t see my work as individual images; I don’t want somebody to walk to that image and look at it individually, because it is part of a body of work. It’s like approaching a piece of literature and only bothering with one sentence. So many people seem to have got it stuck in their heads that a photograph has to be like a painting, it has to be an individual image that can be appreciated like a painting, now personally I don’t believe that can happen; a painting and a photograph are nothing alike.”

I have to hint I think, give them a certain amount of help; I don’t want to have text. Text and photography has its problems, it can work, but if it’s just a description of the image you’re looking at then it’s pointless. People still want to look at my photo’s as individual images, until I get it in a book or a plasma screen and I’m controlling how people look at it. In my last exhibition I was watching people they were going to one image and across to another one, looking at the big images and ignoring the smaller ones. They think it’s a big image so that must be important. It wasn’t working, I learnt a lot from that exhibition, what I expected people to do they didn’t. I need to learn how to help people.”

“I WAS WATCHING PEOPLE THEY WERE GOING TO ONE IMAGE AND ACROSS TO ANOTHER ONE, LOOKING AT THE BIG IMAGES AND IGNORING THE SMALLER ONES. THEY THINK IT’S A BIG IMAGE SO THAT MUST BE IMPORTANT.”



How important is a sense of place in your work?

“It works in reverse, it isn’t important until I start photographing something then it is very important. [In *Beating the Bounds*] I chose the fields at random, the place wasn’t important. The project was initiated by ideas, ideas of retracing steps, photographing from set points, photographing something other people don’t look at. People come on holiday to Pembrokeshire and they stand and look at the sea, with their back to the fields. Fields are really amazing nature reserves. The farmer maybe goes into the fields four times a year and he rarely ever gets out of his tractor. In the nature reserve where I photograph the trees that look like things, I see far more people than I do in the fields! Basically I don’t meet anybody in the fields.”

“I can’t think of anything where I’ve thought, “oh I must photograph there”; it doesn’t start like that, it starts with an idea like “I want to photograph life on a farm.” How do I want to photograph it? It’s only once I am really well into a project that the sense of place seeps into my work. I’m looking for new ways of doing documentary photography, so I’m incorporating things like fine art into documentary; I’m incorporating things like wildlife photography into documentary. I really feel photography needs a shake up; it needs to be thinking of doing new things, otherwise we all go out and do the same photographs again and again and again.”

Is part of art personal expression?

“It is! Documentary is. There’s no documentary photographer that’s very been out there that’s ever photographed objectively. It’s all subjective, we choose what to photograph, what not to photograph. That’s what photography is, when you look at a photograph you are looking at the tiny, tiny amount of time and place that the photographer chose to show you. We leave out most of everything, most of the world, most of the time, it’s completely subjective and it lies. I love the fact that it lies, that’s the power of a photograph and everybody believes it tells the

truth. It’s all an illusion. Like I said before a photograph is a piece of paper with ink on it and everything else is read and people read things differently. It’s all about what’s not shown, as much as anything.”

“I’m using very, very passive compositions [in *BTB* and *Quiet Storm*]. In other words I’m not cutting my subjects in half, I’m not having them in and out of the frame. Everything is within the frame, the trees aren’t cut off, unlike street photography where you get in very close and say an arm leaves the frame, that’s active composition. Passive framing is like Michael Kenna where everything is very pure, not cut off, suspended in the image, very passive. Cartier-Bresson’s photographs are very active; he was always cutting people off, severing the tops of their heads and their arms. That is a subjective way of looking at things. People underestimate photography; it’s very, very complex. There are so many things you can do to make a photograph have a different effect on people. People who use “template” photography don’t understand that. They need to look at artists, one of the best artists to look at, as a photographer was Degas, he was one of the first artists to actually crop people. It hadn’t been done in art before, if there were people in the painting, they were all in the painting. So photography is totally subjective in the way you crop and reduce the world to a tiny element. Like Cartier-Bresson’s *Decisive Moment*, it’s impossible to pick up a camera and not be subjective. The amount of people that come to me and say “did it really look like that?” It’s a crazy thing to say about photography. Because of course the world is not flat, the world’s not frozen in time, the world is not blurred, it’s not cropped, I mean what are you talking about!”

What are the limitations you’ve placed on yourself for *Beating the Bounds* and why?

“The basic limitations I’ve placed on myself are the same limitations that most artists apply to themselves. The constraints actually help, without constraints it’s all over the place. I’ve always

“THERE’S NO DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHER THAT’S VERY BEEN OUT THERE THAT’S EVER PHOTOGRAPHED OBJECTIVELY. IT’S ALL SUBJECTIVE, WE CHOOSE WHAT TO PHOTOGRAPH, WHAT NOT TO PHOTOGRAPH.”

needed constraints because the more constraints I've got the better my photographs become and that works for any photographer I believe. So by physically creating restraints – by not leaving the track I can't think, "oh if I was over there I'd get a better shot" therefore I can't just do this or that. I have to start thinking "I am walking down this track. How can I tell my story?"

But is it forcing yourself to see afresh, is that the point of the restraint?

"Afresh yes, but also to look at the things again and again to try to find the magic in them. So I'm not thinking, "I'll find something magical to photograph" which is what so many photographers do. I get so many people on workshops who say, "Where should I go to photograph? Should I go to Tibet? Should I go to Peru?" Why? What do you know about Peru or Tibet? Let somebody who lives there photograph it; there are enough photographers all over the world for that. If you're a landscape photographer you think I must go to Iceland or I must go to Glen Coe. If you're a documentary photographer you think I must photograph drug addicts or whatever."

Is there an element of contradiction in you denying there's a sense of place until you photograph it?

"No, that's not the same. I still start with an idea, I never start with 'I want to photograph there'. There are a lot of reasons why I photograph around myself and one of them is because I believe people should photograph what they know about. I also believe why go anywhere else. If somebody from Tibet comes to Nolton Haven it'll be the most exotic place in the world to them because it's different, that's all it is but what do you love about Nolton Haven? What would I know about Tibet if I went there? What could you photograph? Just the exotic. You'll end up with National Geographic type photographs. I don't like that genre, they don't tell you anything, they are just pretty pictures, they are really so superficial."



"I want to think, "what's interesting about the things that I love?" So hedges, the countryside, farms (because I was brought up on a farm), basically rural life. That's what I know about so that's what I want to photograph."

What's the route of placing these barriers in place? What forced you into that?

"I just found the more barriers I have, the more restrictions I have, the better photographs I'll take." ***But what actually took you to that idea?*** "Commercial work, if you're doing say interiors, you're working to somebody else's criteria, they come up with the idea. For a magazine the look has to be the look that the company needs. I can't make them all dark and broody! So I have all those criteria that I had to work within and I found that helped me take good photographs. Artists have always worked like that. Magritte didn't one day paint a Turner, one day a Constable, he had an idea and he set constraints on himself. Turner would choose a particular palette; he worked within that palette, he didn't think, "I can have any colour I like". Artists, writers and musicians have always worked within constraints, some more than others. Why don't more photographers?"

"Once you've got constraints you can then focus on what you want to say. Then you don't have to worry about all these other ideas. You can really focus on what you want to say and how you can communicate that to the person who is looking at it. They may not work, people may not get what you are trying to say, that's not their fault it's my fault. I then have to work harder to find other ways of doing it?"

"I know with BTBs I've gone quite extreme. Initially, I sat down and wrote out a list of the things I'm interested in, just randomly. I wrote down things like "folk tradition", I'm fascinated by folklore; "artefacts", rural artefacts and the "visual history of the landscape". So you could see where there's a mark, you get hints of a hedge or a ditch, so you can start unravelling the past. The "memories tied up in somewhere", I'm interested in that. The "wildlife in the

landscape"; you know I never understand when I looked at all these landscape photographs, where are all the animals, where's the wildlife? I'm interested in magical realism, and how music or literature can be incorporated as a basic form – a structure within photography."

"I'm interested in how a photograph looks, one of the things I love about a photograph is how people forget that depending what shutter speed you use, you can leave things out just by letting less light in. Bill Brandt was passionate about that; he could leave out half the world, not by not having it in the frame but just by not letting enough light in to show it. I'm happy to have big chunks of things missing. I love negative space, I find white negative space much harder to work with than black negative space but I do love black negative space. In my storm shots people say to me "why is that silhouetted, they didn't look like that?" and I say no, the world doesn't look silhouetted to my eyes, but it did to the camera. The world doesn't look frozen or blurred but it does to the camera. I'm interested in how the camera sees the world not how I see it."

You talk a lot about memory, especially in BTB...? (I'm cut off in mid question)

"I agree with John Berger, photography is so like memory, you open a draw of family snapshots, you've got all these jumbled memories, visual memories and when you look at one photograph it will spark off a memory of something else but there isn't a time line, like maybe in literature. One image can feed off another image, that is very similar to memory. Like Proust with his smells, you can trigger off a whole line of memories just by a smell, well an image does the same. A photograph can trigger a whole line of memories about a person or a place, or something within yourself."

"MAGRITTE DIDN'T
ONE DAY PAINT A
TURNER, ONE DAY A
CONSTABLE, HE HAD
AN IDEA AND HE SET
CONSTRAINTS ON
HIMSELF..."



“...I RECKON MAYBE 80 % OF COMMUNICATION IN THE WORLD IS VISUAL BUT WE’RE NOT TAUGHT IT, IT’S AS IF IT’S SUPPOSED TO BE PICKED UP NATURALLY...”

For you, does memory have a visual or verbal route or both?

“Good question! I think memory is very emotional. Emotional can be both verbal and visual. When you look at *Another Way of Telling* it is all visual, but it’s also very emotional and I think that it’s the emotion triggered by the photograph that creates the story line. Usually it’s emotions that trigger one memory to another memory to another. The most powerful photograph is the photograph of a loved one, especially if that person has gone. You’ve suddenly got this almost physical, emotional memory in your hand.”

On our walk through the five fields, Tancock began to expound further on his ideas for controlling the display of his images and how he can weave themes throughout the exhibition. This is perhaps the revelation of our discussion.

“People aren’t taught to read images and definitely not taught to read multiple images, whereas we are taught music and we are taught literature, taught to read and it’s a crazy one for me because I reckon maybe 80% of communication in the world is visual but we’re not taught it, it’s as if it’s supposed to be picked up naturally. I think that when people look at a photograph they think it exists in front of them but it doesn’t, it exists inside their head and then they project it back on the page. A photograph has to be read and you have to learn to read images. It doesn’t come

naturally, a newborn baby doesn't see an image it just sees the ink on paper. With any image you can misread it, and people do."

"Once we realise that we have to read images then we can take that a step further and ask how do we read images in conjunction with each other? All I'm doing is trying to carry on the baton for people like John Berger who thought of these ideas; I'm not nearly as important as they were. I think these ideas are great, but unless you put in an enormous amount of effort, or you've read John Berger, then it's not going to hit you straight away. So my idea was to find helping hints, so I started looking at music. In music you have rhythms, or you have a refrain that keeps on recurring. So I would have a shape that's not physically to do with the image, the shape of a curve, the line of sheep in a field, followed by the same shape running through a plough line, running through some geese flying through the sky. I use that refrain to draw a person down through that series of images and those images can have other images that are connected to those running along them. You're trying to say to people stop looking at this as an individual image, forgetting it and moving on to the next individual image, there is something connecting them. And if those refrains jump out and make you look like that, then maybe you'll look for other connections. It may not work, I'm not saying it's going to work, but you've got to try."

"So I started photographing the same bush, over and over again, which has been done a thousand times before by photographers but what I can also say is that I can photograph the same place again and again but from lots of different aspects, if they are grouped together and people have already started thinking about groups of images, then they'll start looking at a more complex way of doing that in a new light rather than seeing them as a jumble of shots. Rather than seeing the photograph of the gate with the birds flying up, seeing a photograph of the birds flying up, it's not it's a photograph of the gate. Things happen around gates, gates have lives; I want to photograph those things that happen. It's not sterile land where the gate just sits on it's



own all the time. What I want to do is show lots and lots of different aspects, but if I'm going to do that I'm going to have to help people to try to understand what I'm saying."

Do you think of yourself as following in the Romantic tradition?

"Oh definitely! But not as we think of romance nowadays. John Clare was a Romantic poet, but he was also a scientific poet in the sense that much of the information we have about flora and fauna in his period was because he wrote poems about them. He wrote poems about them in their environment. A naturalist once said, "Romanticism is about finding the relationship and the way things live together". Now that might be a field with a tree in it, now how do the field and the tree relate to each other?

A scientist will just look at the tree whereas a Romantic will look at how they live together and how I the viewer interpret it, the story I weave round it. John Clare documented orchids, he gave them addresses, but it wasn't a Latin address or a geographical address, it was "Mr Blogg's back garden" or "the meadow

"...ONCE WE REALISE THAT WE HAVE TO READ IMAGES THEN WE CAN TAKE THAT A STEP FURTHER AND ASK HOW DO WE READ IMAGES IN CONJUNCTION WITH EACH OTHER?"

that used to be common land, but isn't any more" and it was all about how things lived together, how everything is intertwined. So that's the sort of Romanticism I'm interested in, not the Disney sort of romance, or the chocolate box view of nature. It's a Romance of the history of that gate, or how that gate has come there, what happens to that gate. That's why I get so bored with landscape photography, there's no Romance in landscape photography, it's all composition, calligraphy. They try to make it romantic by taking sunsets. That's crazy, that's not my idea of Romance. I'm very much into the way the past and the present intertwine and how they can be seen in each other and that is Romantic. I'm also interested in the way a hedge has grown into the shapes it has because maybe at one time it was layered or it's been confined. Like I said I'm interested in folk tradition, I'm interested in myth and local tradition."

"You know, in documentary photography some people want to be a fly on the wall. I've always believed you can't be a fly on the wall. I am more than happy with the idea that as soon as I walk into that field I change everything. I'm photographing cycles in a way. There's my own cycle (beating my bounds), also the seasonal cycles but I'm also photographing the cycles that the animals have, they beat their bounds. So the magpies, every evening they sit in that Elder bush and every morning they sit in the other one but I've never seen them do the opposite. I love the fact that I have this ritual of walking the boundaries and the animals have their rituals. I walk my boundary and the fox walks his boundaries and our boundaries intersect. I like that aspect of it and again that's Romantic. It's not very scientific, it's part of understanding the environment. John Clare said it's no good catching a butterfly, taking it into a lab and studying it; you need to study it in the field or where ever it lives. There's a composition that I use a lot, where the fox is in the image although he's a tiny speck really but that's him in context. So many wildlife photographers don't do that, they zoom in on the animal, it's like catching your butterfly and pinning it on a board, no Romance!"

So what can we learn from a man who admits to, at the very best, working marginally outside the landscape genre? Firstly, the documentary approach gives some great insights into both ideas and techniques, that can introduce far more originality, complexity and far more of ourselves and our interests into our work.

Secondly, Tancock's localism, his found passion for what he already knows and loves, should give us all pause for thought. I can hear the refrain of "but where I live is boring" coming from a thousand minds. But it's not as if those five fields he uses for *Beating the Bounds* are anything remarkable, quite the opposite, I've seen them, they are as unremarkable as any fields you have seen anywhere.

And what of the restrictive methodology, the constraints and barriers he uses? We can learn from them that there are indeed ways to break the conventions we all carry with us in our heads. He has found himself forced to make images out of what he finds in front of himself and created a body of work that is magical, elegiac and unique. But they also serve to shine a light on landscape photography, documentary photography and many of our preconceptions, to find them wanting. Could it be that light also shows a route towards a more artistic sensibility? That is a question I'll leave you to make up your own mind about.

You can see more of Chris Tancock's work at www.christancock.com

"...I LOVE THE FACT THAT I HAVE THIS RITUAL OF WALKING THE BOUNDARIES AND THE ANIMALS HAVE THEIR RITUALS. I WALK MY BOUNDARY AND THE FOX WALKS HIS BOUNDARIES AND OUR BOUNDARIES INTERSECT..."

on landscape

Discuss Chris's work

.....
www.onlandscape.co.uk/2011/02/ beating-the-bounds-with-chris-tancock/

THE DIFFRACTION LIMIT

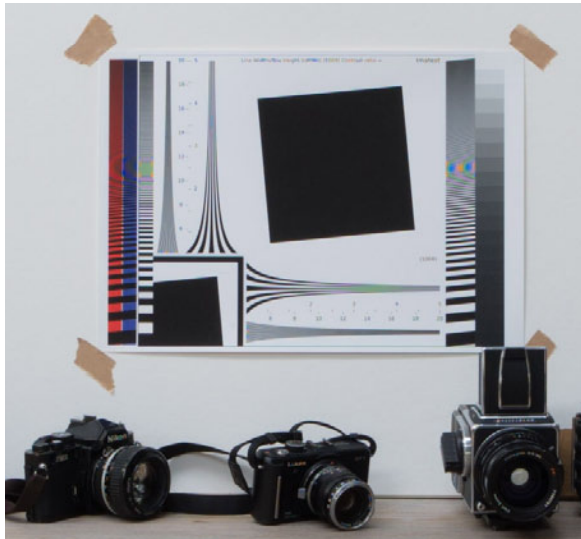
HOW SMALL IS TOO SMALL?

by Tim Parkin

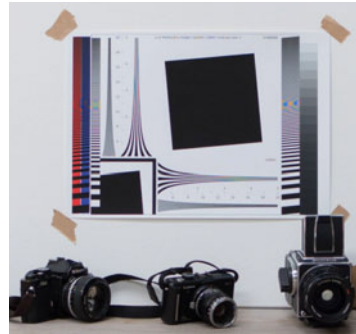
I think most photographers will have come across various online resources, books, magazines and blog posts telling them that certain apertures are ‘out of bounds’ and that in order to get the sharpest pictures they need to use a narrow band of apertures (usually $f/5.6$ or $f/8$ for 35mm cameras). As mentioned in last issue though, a test of some lenses seen recently where smaller aperture results on the D800 resolved more than the best aperture results on a 5Dmk3 got us thinking. Last week myself, Mark Banks and Joe Cornish met up to run some tests where we used the 36Mp Nikon D800E and a 24Mp Sony A900 (same sensor as the Nikon D3X) at various apertures to find out just how much affect diffraction had on our final prints.

Now testing this is fairly simple, we take a couple of cameras and shoot a test target at a range of apertures. The trick is, how do we sharpen them. Well – only trial and error can fix this one and so after using our test target in Joe’s studio, I spent an afternoon trying different sharpening strategies.

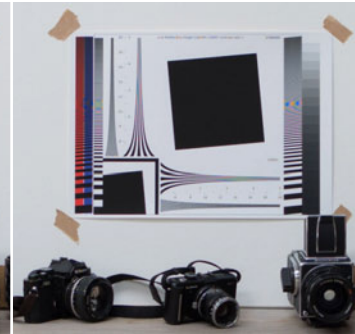
I finally settled on the application of two rounds of sharpening, one at a very fine radius and one at a broader radius and then a final unsharp mask to bring contrast back up. Before we show the effects of this though, let's have a look at the range of apertures for the D800E.



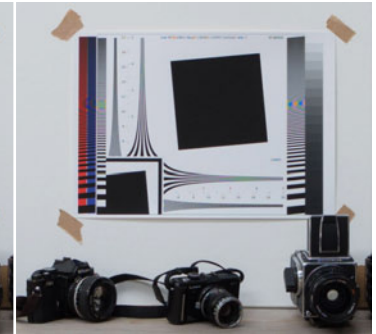
f8



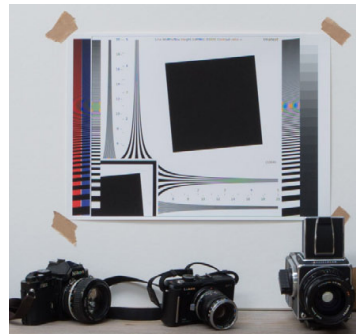
f2.8



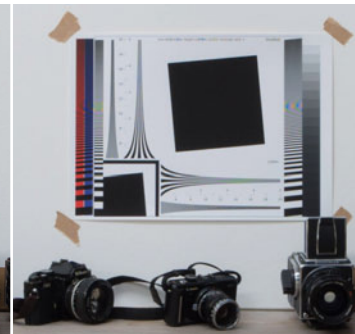
f4



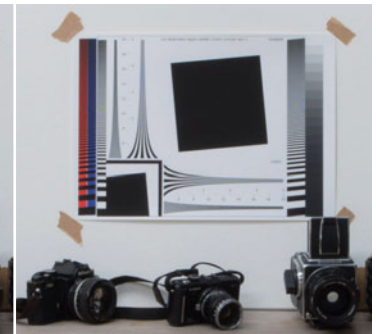
f5.6



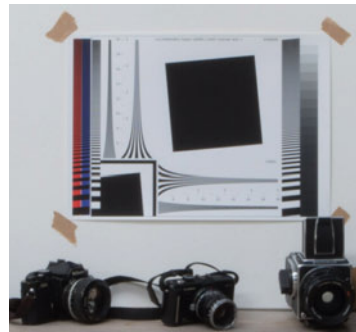
f8



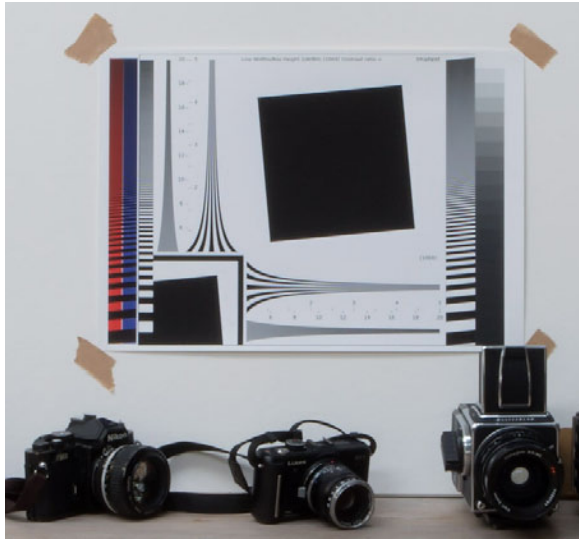
f11



f16



f22



f22

Now you can obviously see the effects of diffraction on the previous page and the f/22 looks incredibly soft. However, let's apply our custom sharpening to each of these and see what we can come up with.

Now things are looking a little closer but the f/22 shot still looks like it has lost of a bit of contrast. However, the final test is to print these and stick them in front of some unsuspecting punters. So we did. And they couldn't tell the difference....

Now it's worth restating that – real live punters couldn't tell the difference between a shot taken at f/5.6 and one taken at f/22.

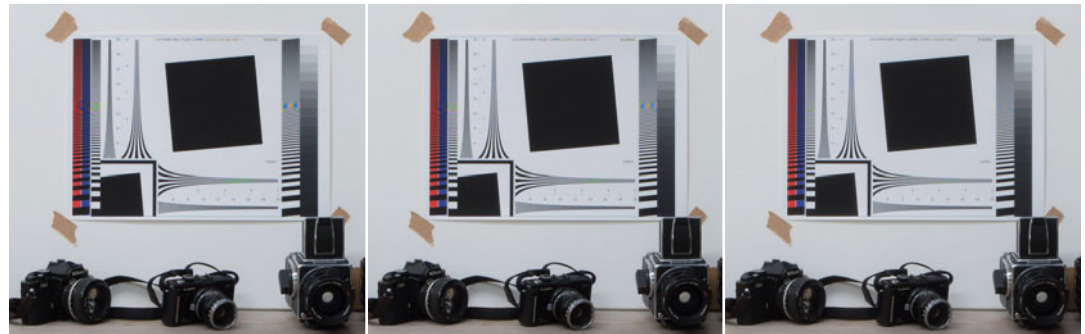
We tried this at various print resolutions and for everything from 360dpi to 240dpi our punters couldn't tell the difference. At 180dpi it does look like the f/22 has lost a bit of 'bite' and contrast but the f/16 looks fine. If the photos weren't shown side by side I don't think people could have told the difference.



f2.8

f4

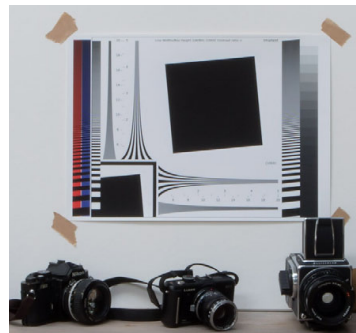
f5.6



f8

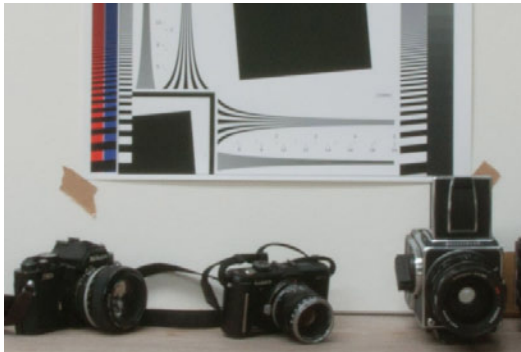
f11

f16



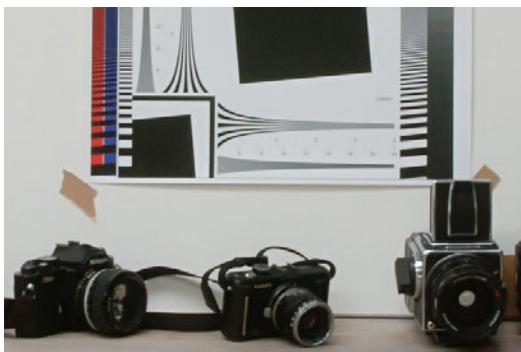
f22

We repeated the test for the A900 and got slightly different results – first of all here are the unsharpened 100% apertures.

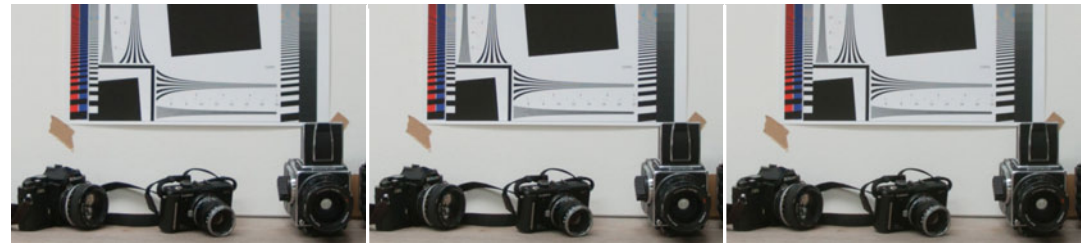


f22 unsharpened

Now when we sharpen these files we get a little surprise in that the f/22 result does show more significant reduction in quality. The smaller apertures are also showing more noise when sharpened. This just shows how clean the D800 images were that they could take such strong sharpening without showing much textural noise. However, when printed the f/22 result does well but starts to show some quality loss at about 240dpi.



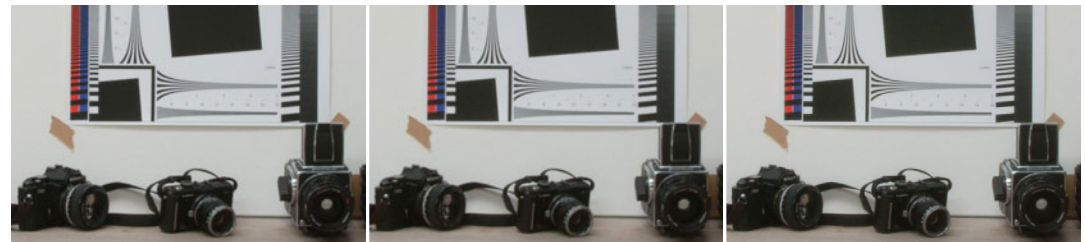
f22 sharpened



f4

f5.6

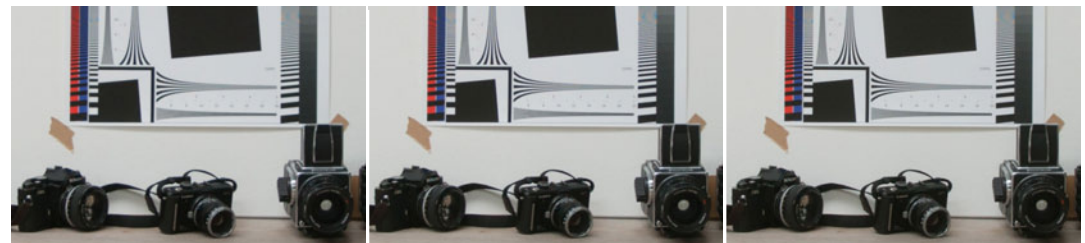
f8



f11

f16

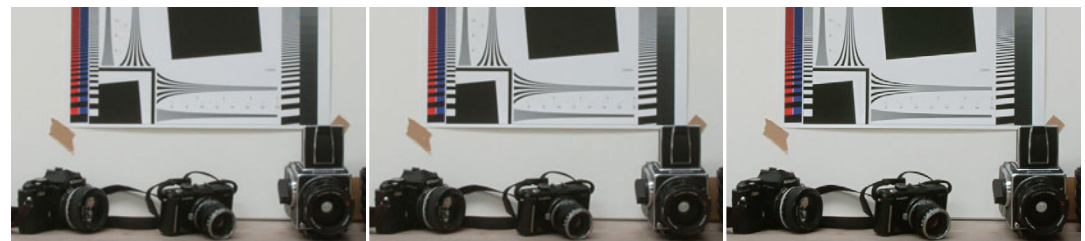
f22



f4

f5.6

f8



f11

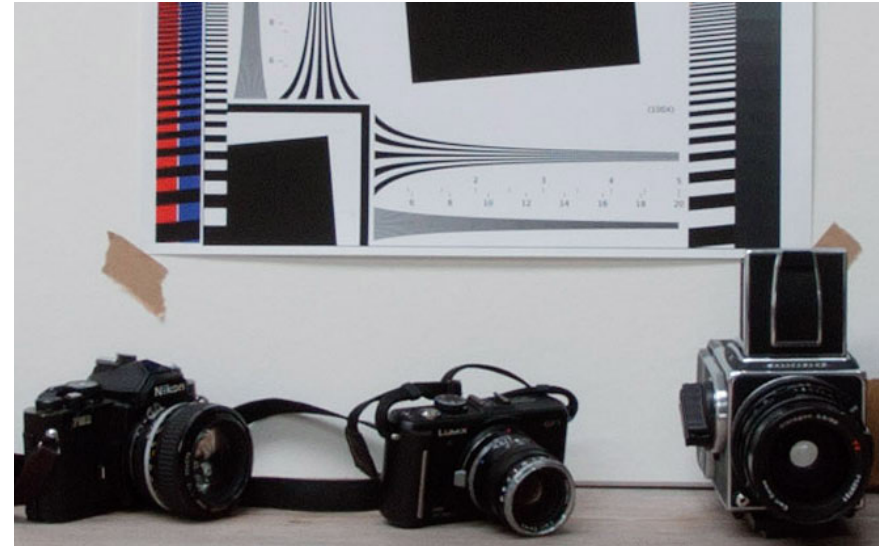
f16

f22



Nikon D800 f22

Our final comparison was to confirm what we had seen that got us thinking about things – what would the f/22 D800 file look like in comparison with a Sony A900 f/8 file? Well, the answer is that they're pretty close with the D800 getting a cleaner result. Surprising yes?



Sony A900 f8

Finally one of our readers (Simone – tjshot) sent us a link to his research where he used variously well sourced theoretical figures to calculate the potential of various sensors given optimal sharpening. You can look at his research yourself although be warned it is quite in depth. He's given us permission to reproduce a couple of the most pertinent tables here though.

The following tables give a lot of information but I've highlighted the critical parts. The three tables show a 21, 36 and 50 megapixel camera. Each row shows a different aperture. The yellow columns show the theoretical resolution of the lens for 50% contrast (MTF 50) and for 10% contrast (MTF 10).

Now the figures that are normally quoted for cameras are the unsharpened MTF 50 (50% contrast) values which you can see in pale blue. From this you can see that the value of 26 lp/mm for f/22 is a fraction of the 47 lp/mm for f/5.6 (on the 36Mp camera).

However, if we add sharpening (pink column) we get 60 lp/mm for f/22 compared with 80 lp/mm for 5.6. And finally, if we look at the 10% contrast figures with sharpening (green column), we see that 100 lp/mm for f/22 and 105 for f/5.6!! Hardly any difference. And this is for simple sharpening!

As Simone has shown, the resolving power of a 36mp camera at f/22 does out resolve a 21Mp sensor at any aperture setting. And into the future, a 50Mp sensor will continue to out resolve the 36Mp sensor, even at f/22. This has even been shown in practise as the 7D has the same pixel density as a possible full frame 50Mp camera.

| MTF values for excellent real prime | | | MTF values for excellent real prime + 21Mpxls Full Frame Sensor | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| wavelength of light=0.00055 | | | 21 Megapixel Camera | | | | |
| | | | No Sharpening | | Sharpened | | |
| f-stop | MTF 50% (lp/mm) | MTF 10% (lp/mm) | MTF 50% (lp/mm) | MTF 10% (lp/mm) | MTF 50% (lp/mm) | MTF 10% (lp/mm) | sharpening parameters |
| 2.8 | | | 37 | 75 | 63 | 78 | K=0.5, r=1 |
| 4 | | | 37 | 75 | 63 | 78 | K=0.5, r=1 |
| 5.6 | 65 | 195 | 41 | 78 | 65 | 78 | K=0.45, r=1 |
| 8 | 53 | 159 | 37 | 75 | 63 | 78 | K=0.5, r=1 |
| 11 | 45 | 135 | 34 | 70 | 61 | 78 | K=0.55, r=1 |
| 16 | 38 | 91 | 31 | 62 | 55 | 78 | K=0.6, r=1 |
| 22 | 28 | 68 | 25 | 52 | 49 | 78 | K=0.7, r=1 |

| MTF values for excellent real prime | | | MTF values for excellent real prime + 36Mpxls Full Frame Sensor | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| wavelength of light=0.00055 | | | 36 Megapixel Camera | | | | |
| | | | No Sharpening | | Sharpened | | |
| f-stop | MTF 50% (lp/mm) | MTF 10% (lp/mm) | MTF 50% (lp/mm) | MTF 10% (lp/mm) | MTF 50% (lp/mm) | MTF 10% (lp/mm) | sharpening parameters |
| 2.8 | 247 | 532 | 41 | 88 | 80 | 105 | K=0.5, r=1 |
| 4 | 173 | 373 | 41 | 88 | 80 | 105 | K=0.5, r=1 |
| 5.6 | 65 | 195 | 47 | 95 | 80 | 105 | K=0.5, r=1 |
| 8 | 53 | 159 | 41 | 88 | 80 | 105 | K=0.5, r=1 |
| 11 | 45 | 135 | 37 | 82 | 77 | 105 | K=0.65, r=1 |
| 16 | 38 | 91 | 33 | 70 | 67 | 105 | K=0.7, r=1 |
| 22 | 28 | 68 | 26 | 56 | 60 | 100 | K=0.8, r=1 |

| MTF values for excellent real prime | | | MTF values for excellent real prime + 50Mpxls Full Frame Sensor | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| wavelength of light=0.00055 | | | 50 Megapixel Camera | | | | |
| | | | No Sharpening | | Sharpened | | |
| f-stop | MTF 50% (lp/mm) | MTF 10% (lp/mm) | MTF 50% (lp/mm) | MTF 10% (lp/mm) | MTF 50% (lp/mm) | MTF 10% (lp/mm) | sharpening parameters |
| 2.8 | 247 | 532 | 44 | 96 | 90 | 115 | K=0.65, r=1 |
| 4 | 173 | 373 | 44 | 96 | 90 | 115 | K=0.65, r=1 |
| 5.6 | 65 | 195 | 50 | 105 | 90 | 115 | K=0.55, r=1 |
| 8 | 53 | 159 | 39 | 96 | 90 | 115 | K=0.65, r=1 |
| 11 | 45 | 135 | 34 | 89 | 88 | 115 | K=0.7, r=1 |
| 16 | 38 | 91 | 26 | 74 | 74 | 115 | K=0.75, r=1 |
| 22 | 28 | 68 | 25 | 58 | 69 | 115 | K=0.8, r=1 |



f5.6



f22

We've done a couple of Ad-Hoc tests on 'pictorial' subject matter and the 'theory' holds up well (I've reduced this to 60% to give you an idea of what it looks like in print – you'll have to trust me that it looks very close). Our own conclusion is that you should be absolutely fine shooting at f/16 and if you need f/22, go for it!

Summary

We showed that for the D800E, the f/22 result could be sharpened until it was a fairly close match for the f/8 or f/5.6 image, albeit with some additional texture and lower overall contrast. When printed, it was difficult to make out the difference unless they were made at 180dpi or less. f/16 could be sharpened until it was identical in print.

The diffraction at f/22 also served the purpose of removing any moire effects completely (and at f/16 it was very small). When compared the the Sony A900 results we also confirmed that the Nikon D800E at f/22 is sharper than the Sony A900 at f/5.6 – a remarkable result!

It was also interesting that the Sony A900 shot at f/22 wasn't quite as sharp as it's f/5.6 f/8 result – the reduction in contrast and increase in noise/texture was enough to reduce the f/22 result somewhat. f/16 did look good though. It seems that you need more resolution and cleaner files to make the most of these f/22 results.

Furthermore we had the theoretical contribution from Simone which correlated well with our findings in that the contrast at f/22 is reduced by about 20% but the detail is still all there. Simone has also worked out the results for a 50Mp sensor and has confirmed that we should see the same effects with theoretical 50Mp camera outresolving the Nikon D800E even when shot at f/22.

Conclusion

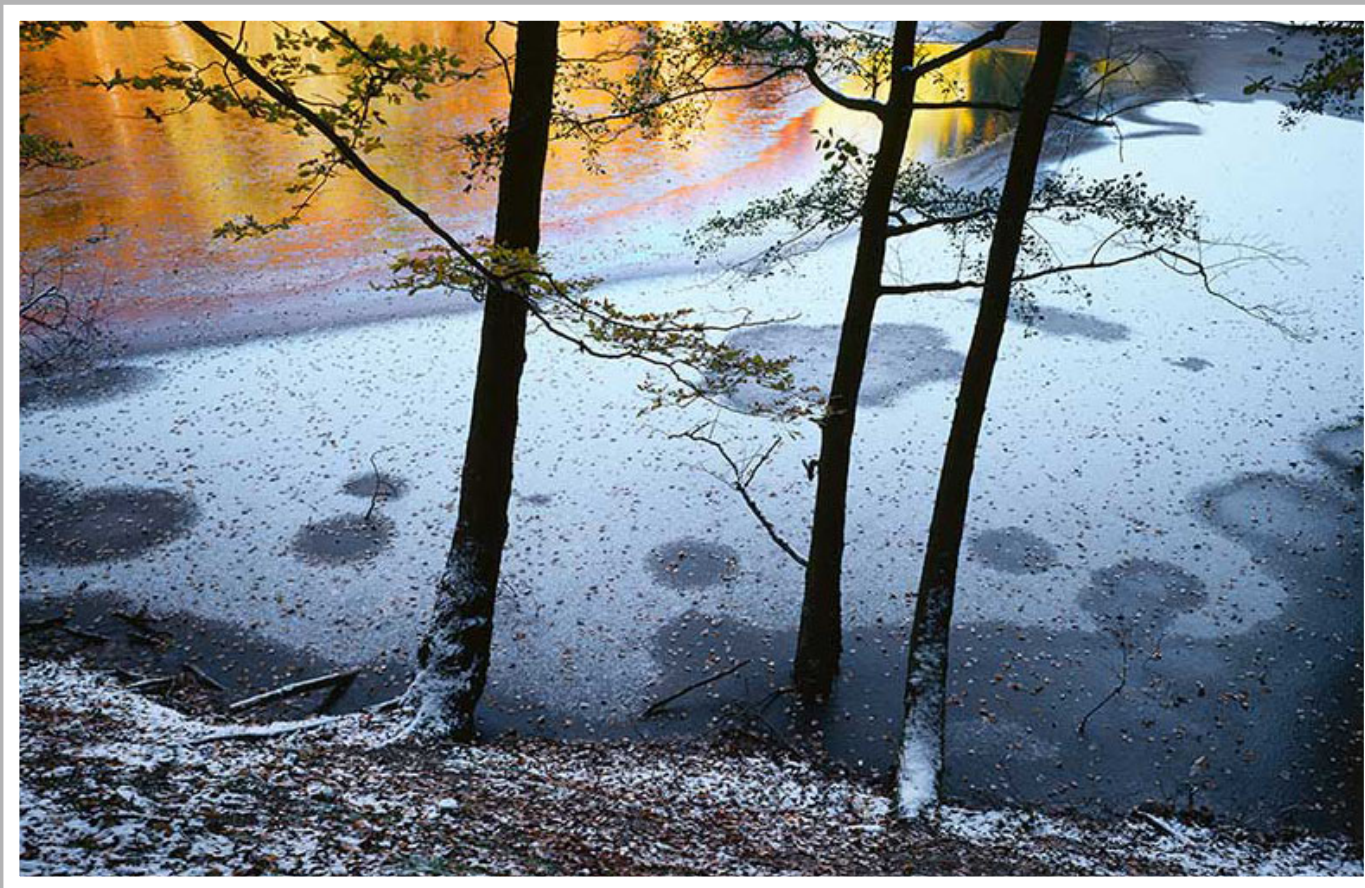
You can't beat resolution. Modern sharpening techniques have allowed the treatment of f/22 images so that they are almost indistinguishable from f/5.6 & f/8 images. And further resolution will continue to show resolution and contrast improvements even up to 50Mp (and possibly beyond).

It may even be that an 50Mp image shot at f/32 could outresolve a Canon 5dmk3 at f/5.6! The megapixel race is far from over.

on landscape

Discuss this article

www.onlandscape.co.uk/2012/08/the-diffraction-limit-how-small-is-too-small/



CHRIS BELL

INTERVIEW

We've been wanting to feature Chris Bell for some time. He's a favourite photographer of both myself and Joe Cornish (Joe showed me his book *Primal Places* some time ago). It's also become a favourite of most people who I've shown the books to. Chris continues the environmental and artistic work of Olegas Truchanas and Peter Dombrovskis. His work has it's own look though, one which makes the most of this amazing island.

Tim Parkin

INTERVIEW | *Chris Bell*

I've described you as a 'landscape photographer and writer from Tasmania' which is pretty uninformative considering. What do you describe yourself as?

I consider myself a 'Nature' photographer as opposed to a landscape photographer as I don't believe 'landscape' adequately describes my work/ our genera. The word landscape is used so loosely particularly in the pretentious art world as to now mean just about anything: an oil refinery or cityscape can be a landscape. Art practitioners from art schools in particular consider 'Nature' photography either kitsch or simply non-art. Perhaps it's a matter of those people simply being so far removed from Nature they simply cannot relate to it.

I consider myself a Nature writer as the human world does not interest me; I find it incapable of inspiring me like the natural world does. We are reminded all too often about the human world and its ugliness, its destructiveness etc; I find a 'softness' in Nature which is why I photograph it. I write about Nature because I want people to re-connect with the living world.

Could you describe your first experiences with photography and first couple of cameras?

My love of photography began when my mother bought a rangefinder camera for my brother and I when I was about 14 and I became fascinated by photography as, in essence, we are 'creating' something. (Never mind that all those early images were rubbish, but they did lead to where I am now.) From that early rangefinder I progressed to Pentax cameras -through numerous 'improved' models – to finally adopting a Canon system as Canon were developing many ground-breaking features: Fluorite elements, tilt-shift lenses etc. About 30 years ago I acquired my first 4x5 and I now use a Linhof Technikardan.

In most photographers lives there are 'epiphanic' moments where things become clear, or new directions are formed. What were your two main moments and how did they change your photography?

I don't have any 'epiphanic moments' concerning photography but I did have some when it came to Nature in particular wilderness and what it might mean for us. (I remember being taken as a boy to Kanangra Walls in what is now Kanangra Boyd National Park and being entranced at the rugged sandstone cliffs and an infinity of soft, blue forest seemingly endless. That experience would change the way I feel about the living world and its ability to instill peace and a sense of wonder not found elsewhere.) Hence my photos have just been a progression to where I am now rather than any event that was life-changing, The only event that I could call epiphanic concerning my photography was when I was putting my first book together (*A Time to Care: Tasmania's Endangered Wilderness*) and I realised the inadequacy of some of the images. I understood right then and there what composition was all about. My second book, *Beyond the Reach: Cradle Mountain Lake St Clair National Park*, was really the beginning of my really being serious about my work.

Tasmania offers an incredibly varied environment for photography but as many photographers will know, even the best places have their own frustrations. What particular problems does Tasmania come challenge you with?

The frustrations of photographing in Tasmania are, I suspect, not much different than photographing in the UK/Scotland often wet, cold and windy conditions, but there is an additional problem here: so much of the best of our landscapes are wilderness; that is they are remote; often involving walking for 2 to 3 days just to get to



“...IF IT TAKES ME 3 DAYS JUST TO GET TO WHERE I WANT TO WORK THEN IT TAKES THE SAME TIME TO GET OUT; HENCE FOR A 10-DAY TRIP I’M ONLY GETTING 4 DAYS ACTUAL SHOOTING IN!”

Cape Raoul



Alpine Tarn

the core of some of these areas. If it takes me 3 days just to get to where I want to work then it takes the same time to get out; hence for a 10-day trip I'm only getting 4 days actual shooting in! This means a 10 day trip means a 40 kilo pack (if additionally I carry my 35mm camera and a couple of lenses together with my 4x5 gear). For this reason, I believe, too much of the American landscape, for example, is shot from the roadside as it seems too few American photographers want to walk far. You can't do this in Tasmania! So, in a nutshell, photographic trips in Tasmania are very extended difficult affairs; being now 61 years old means I'm really struggling to carry these sorts of weights now.

The narrative of your books exposes little of the photographer. It is a rare landscape photographer that can resist the lure of the appendix and yet with four books 'under your belt' your ego remains contained bar a paragraph in 'The Noblest Stone'. Did you have to have an internal battle in order to come to this conclusion or was it a natural thing for you?

As for 'exposing little of the photographer', I think it is just a personal thing. I think the enormity of Nature makes us more humble as we realise how insignificant we humans really are. I think I am simply an un-assuming person; I generally don't admire those individuals who are using self-aggrandizing / promotional language about themselves. I can't self-sell; I hope my photos speak for themselves.

“...I BELIEVE, TOO MUCH OF THE AMERICAN LANDSCAPE... IS SHOT FROM THE ROADSIDE AS IT SEEMS TOO FEW AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHERS WANT TO WALK FAR. YOU CAN'T DO THIS IN TASMANIA!”



Dunlop Swamp

You helped with the Lake Pedder campaign, was this where you met up with Dombrovskis and Truchanas (excuse my historical inaccuracies if the timeline doesn't make sense).

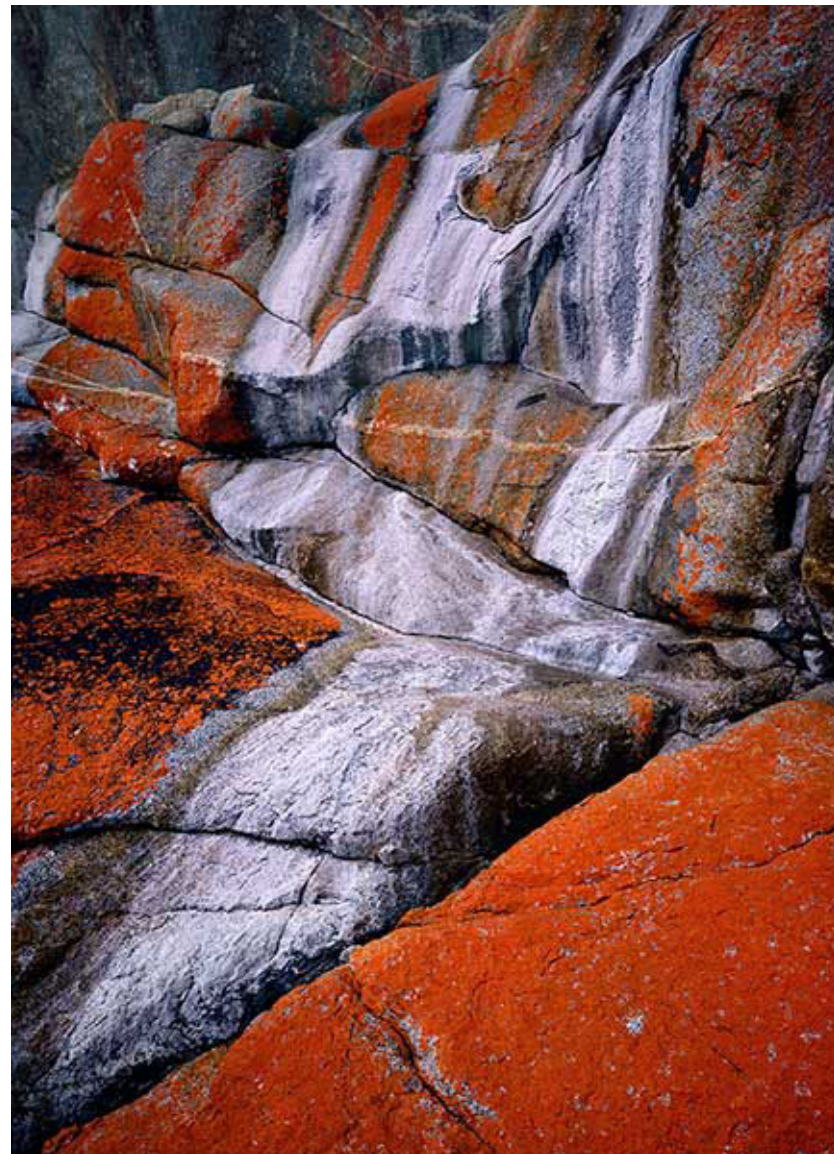
I came to Tasmania to help in the campaign to save Lake Pedder. Olegas Truchanas died on the Gordon River about 2 months before I arrived in Tasmania from mainland Australia. I met Peter Dombrovskis a year later and we became firm friends. I was devastated when he died in the wilderness as he was a soul mate when it came to the natural world.

Geeky questions now I'm afraid.. In the back of 'The Noblest Stone' you have a minor mention of cameras that you use, A Canon AE-1, Pentax 6x7 and Linhof Technikardan. Do you use any other cameras and what focal lengths do you find you use most? Also, what films have you used and do you still experiment?

I still use a Linhof Technikardan 4x5 with 47mm, 65mm 75mm, 90mm, 150mm, 300mm and 500mm lenses (which I don't take all at once of course) I generally use 65mm and 90mm lenses mostly, then 150 and 300mm next. I have used a variety of films but settle mostly on Fujichrome Provia and occasionally Velvia.

I'm presuming you still use a large format camera – have you dabbled in the digital waters yet?

I also use a Canon 5D camera and 16-35mm lens, 24mm tilt-shift lens, 35mm f1.4 lens, 50mm 1.4 lens, 90mm tilt-shift lens and 70-200mm lens.



Lichen and Mineral Stains



Pothole and Grinder



North West Tasmania

“...I LIKE TO THINK THAT THE FOREGROUND IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF A LANDSCAPE; BUT IF NOT THEN I DISPENSE WITH IT..”

Post processing: do you scan, post process and print your own work? If so, what tools and if not who helps? What material do you use for your final prints and why? What sort of post processing do you undertake?

For my exhibition prints I drum scan the 4x5s and work on them digitally before outputting them as ink-jet prints which I believe are far superior than Crystal Archive / Cibachromes. The ink-jet prints are capable of a subtlety not achievable on the afore-mentioned mediums. My ink-jets are either Hahnemuhle William Turner or which I output on a friend's HP, or either Crane Museo Silver Rag or Ilford Gold Fibre Silk which I output on my Epson 7800. (There doesn't seem to be any logic as to which image will suit which paper: you just have to see which medium works best.) I use tools such as PT Gui, Fred Miranda's software to upsize/downsize in Photoshop etc. I suppose I use what most serious photographers use!

Many of your pictures have a very bold, striking diagonals – many composed of prominent foreground material. Is this a symptom of the landscape you work in and the raw mountain terrain in which you like to work?

As to composition, I like to think that the foreground is an integral part of a landscape; but if not then I dispense with it. That is, I don't just include a foreground because I should; I include it because it works! As to diagonals or otherwise I believe to a large extent that the landscape dictates how we should portray it; whilst diagonals are a natural way to dynamically express an image, I intuitively use whatever composition showcases the subject in its most graceful / striking / meaningful way.

Do you have any outstanding goals for your photography and publishing?

As to goals, I have a head-full of ideas which I hope I can fulfill though time (20 years left??) will determine this. At the moment I am working on 2 books: one on the Tarkine area of Tasmania (a rainforest / coastal landscape) and one on the Australian continent.



Erratics - Du Cane Range

“THE ARGUMENT THAT BEAUTIFUL PHOTOGRAPHS WON’T CHANGE POLITICAL OPINIONS IS, I SUSPECT, PROBABLY TRUE. I HOPE NOT...”



Reeds

And here are a few questions from Joe...

There is an argument that says taking beautiful photographs won't change political opinions. How do you react to this and have you ever considered photographing the environmental acts of desecration as part of your work?

The argument that beautiful photographs won't change political opinions is, I suspect, probably true. I hope not, however, and to this effect I still will continue to produce books that just may change the way we think about the natural world. As to photographing 'acts of environmental desecration', I think it is important that someone does it but I can't bring myself to engage



Stream

in it. Life is short and our planet threatened like never before but I am only at peace with myself when I am photographing the living world INTACT!

Would you say there is a school of landscape photography in Tasmania, and if so, can it be credited to Truchanas (and latterly Dombrovskis) or is it an inevitability, given the compelling nature of the landscape?

I think there is a 'school of photography' in Tasmania but I don't think it's entirely attributable to people like Truchanas or Dombrovskis. I think that the fact that so much of Tasmania is still intact (much of it pristine) is the main reason that so many photographers have dedicated their lives / careers to it. Having said all that I think there are vast differences in style between the photographers here which is as it should be.

How do Tasmanians view their photographers; as artists, cultural icons, as environmental activists, or as 'happy snappers'?! Or something else perhaps?, or perhaps photographers are ignored (as in the UK)?

As to the last question, 'How do Tasmanians view their photographers'? I believe the answer is twofold (and I believe it's the same everywhere [Hans Strand in Sweden tells me it's the same there!]) I think the Tasmanian community 'in general' views its photographers perhaps as artists, but the 'arts community' does not. Having our finished works showcased here is never taken seriously by that arts community, but hey, who cares. I strongly believe that the best of Dombrovskis, or Joe Cornish or Ansel Adams will still be considered masterpieces in a hundred years time. Much of the rest of contemporary art which poo-poops landscape or Nature photography, will, I suggest, be considered passe in a generations time

"I THINK THE TASMANIAN COMMUNITY 'IN GENERAL' VIEWS ITS PHOTOGRAPHERS PERHAPS AS ARTISTS, BUT THE 'ARTS COMMUNITY' DOES NOT."

on landscape

Discuss Chris's work

.....
www.onlandscape.co.uk/2011/07/chris-bell-interview/

Does DARK MATTER?

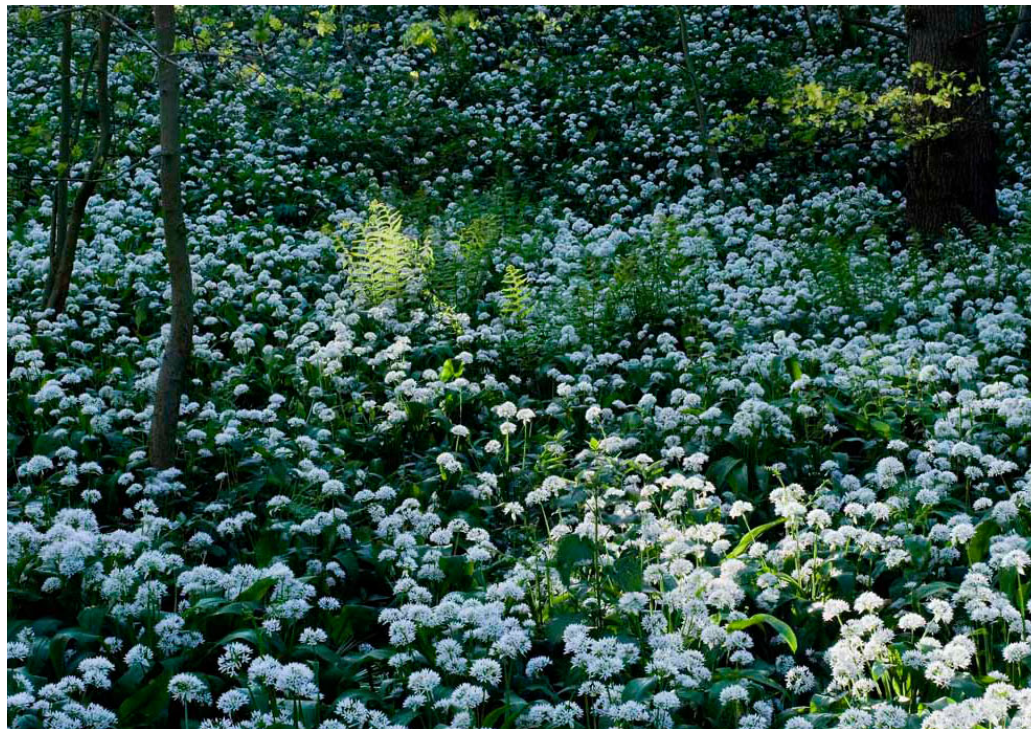
by Paul Moon

It has come to my attention over the last few years that many landscape photographers have begun to shun a very good friend of mine – the black pixel. I'd like to take the opportunity to spend a little time discussing the steady decline in the use of deep shadow in digital photography and post-processing.

I suppose I should start at the point where I began to enjoy seeing well-taken and wonderfully printed landscape images in magazines and books. Most were taken using film and, more often than not, on Fuji Velvia. As many landscape photographers know this transparency film was, and still is, famed for its narrow dynamic range and high saturation, although drum scanning has shown there is far more detail in the shadows than most flatbed scanners can extract. As a result, scanned images often lost shadow detail when printed. These deep, dark shadows were, in my mind, part of the process of image making and helped give the light a firm foundation from which to glow.

Most negative films, on the other hand, contains a far wider dynamic range than that of transparency film and I do enjoy seeing the proper use of these film stocks for subjects that suit the softer tonality – Andrew Nadolski's 'The End of the Land' being a prime example of how negative film works for the subject matter and soft lighting. Even then, Andrew uses areas of near black quite often, consciously limiting the dynamic range or exposing to allow the shadows to block.

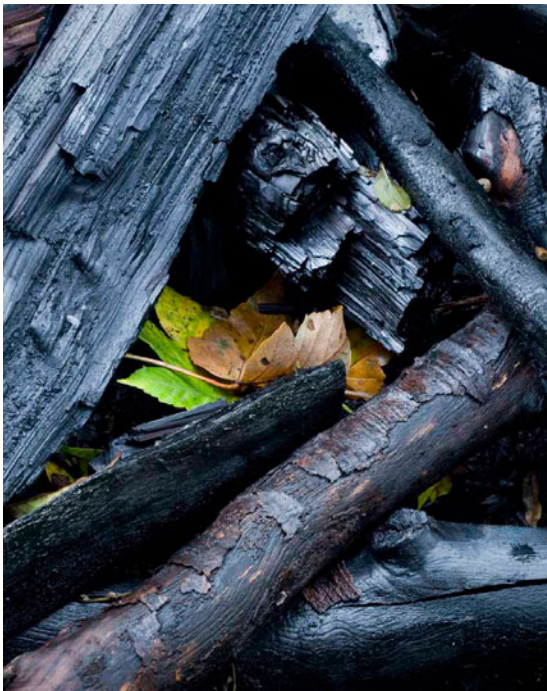
As we know the human vision is far more capable at seeing a wider dynamic range than film and digital sensors but should our photography mimic that dynamism? Many believe it should and hence the proliferation of HDR software and wide dynamic range sensors, but on a personal level I've headed in a completely different direction. I intimated earlier that for me the dark is the foundation for the light to glow from. I'm not implying that every image we take has to include black pixels and deep shadow, just that when there is shadow in a scene should we not show its true tonality in our final result. Obviously silhouettes should contain no detail (I hope!) but where there is shadow and shade should it not



look naturally dark? We shouldn't have to lighten these darker areas into a near mid-tone to show hidden detail.

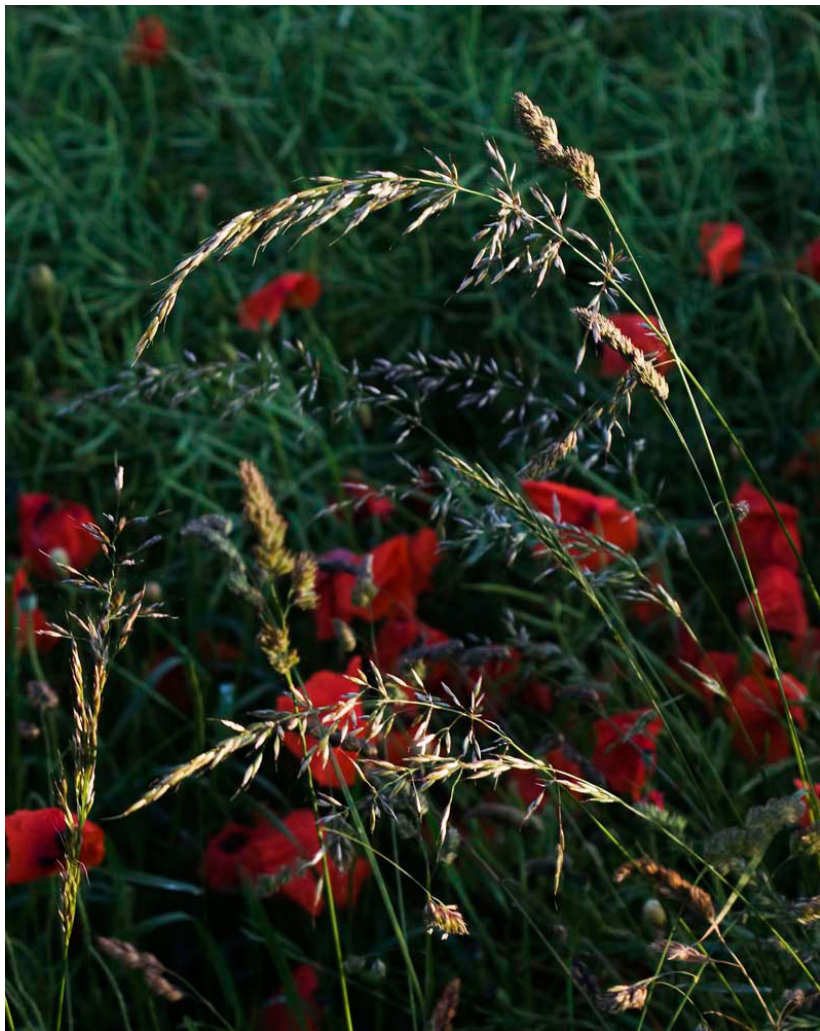
There is also a tendency for over-gridding the sky that often, especially after sunset on coastal images, means that the tonality of the shore and rocks becomes far too light. Surely when the sun goes down the only light is from the darkening sky, and dark surfaces, unless they are wet, will inevitably be dark. I may be on my own here and losing a few readers. As photographers we often make images that are governed by how the 'light' is behaving. Perhaps we should also pay some attention to how the 'dark' is misbehaving.

“SURELY WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN THE ONLY LIGHT IS FROM THE DARKENING SKY, AND DARK SURFACES, UNLESS THEY ARE WET, WILL INEVITABLY BE DARK.”



“...AS WE KNOW THE HUMAN VISION IS FAR MORE CAPABLE AT SEEING A WIDER DYNAMIC RANGE THAN FILM AND DIGITAL SENSORS BUT SHOULD OUR PHOTOGRAPHY MIMIC THAT DYNAMISM?”



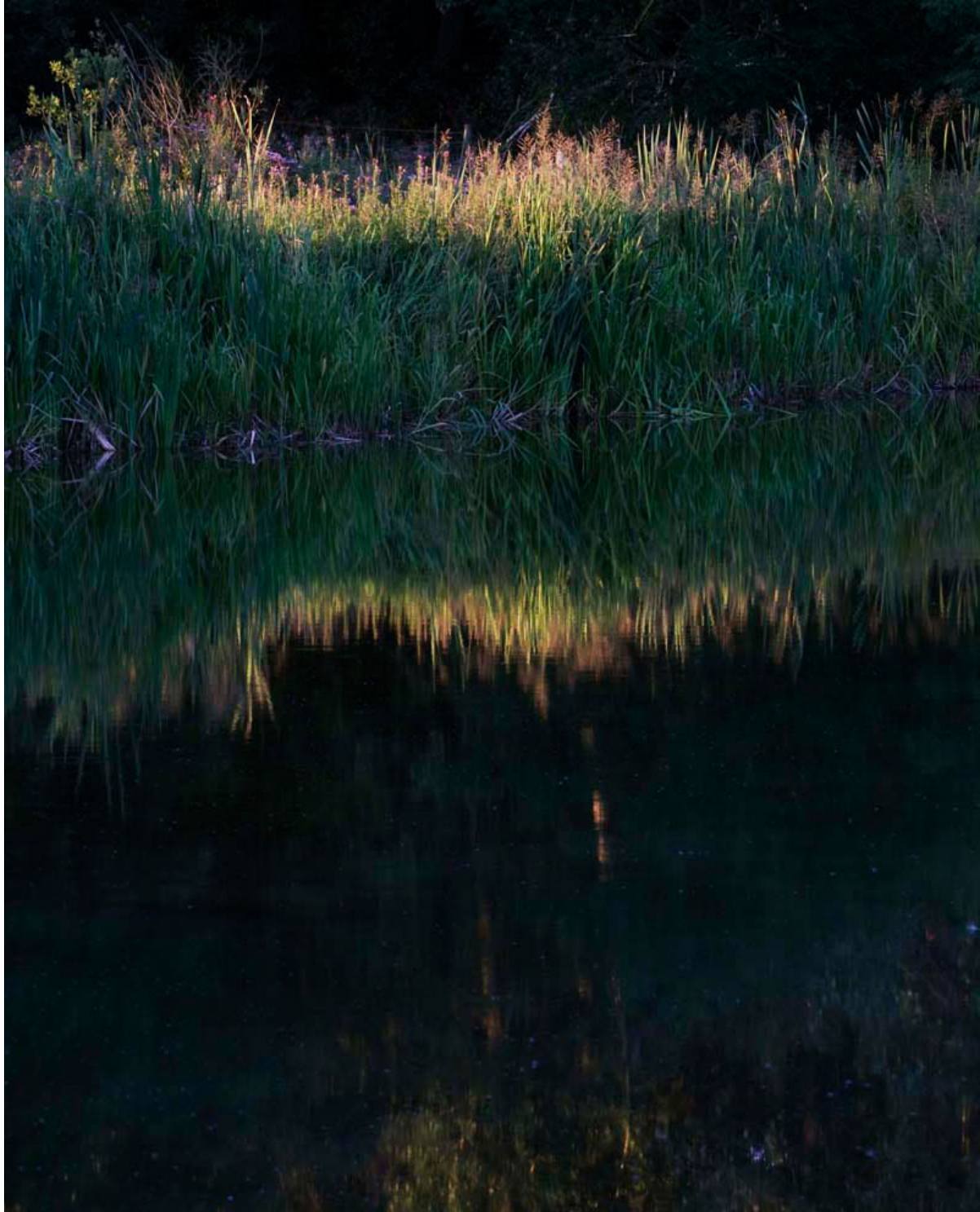


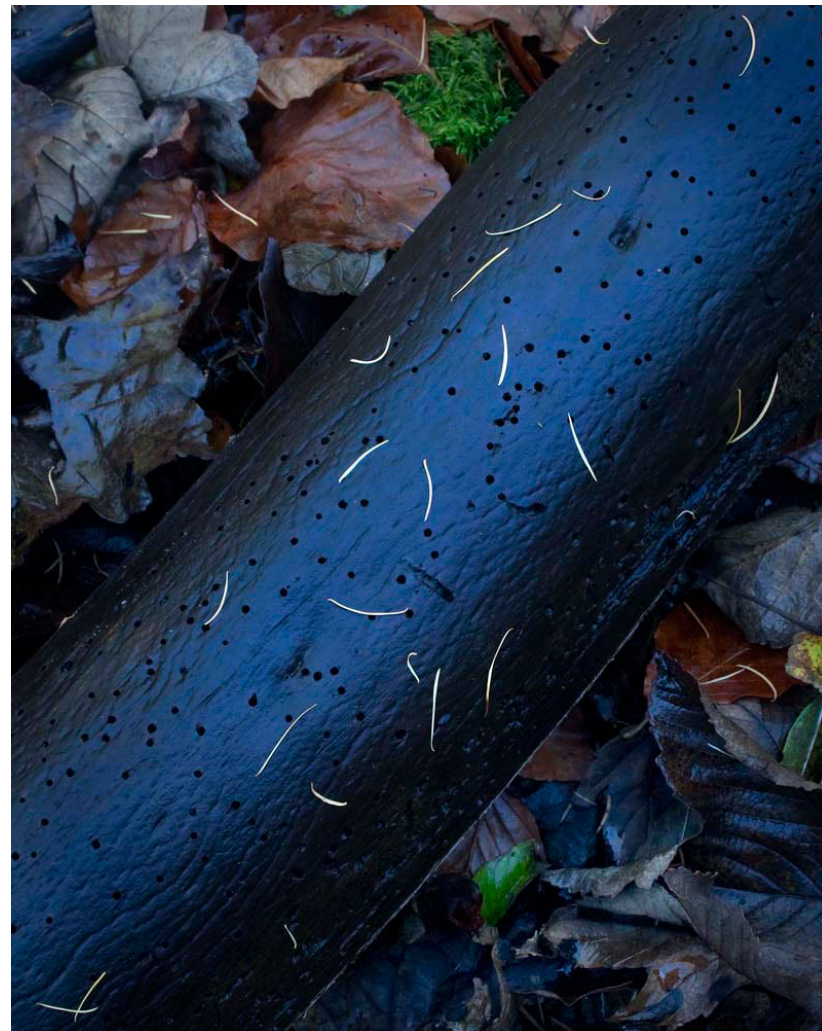
Of course this argument gives way to a host of philosophical conundrums about image making and digital processing. Does my opinion of how an image is processed matter? Certainly not! It's only an opinion and should be largely ignored. We rely far too often on the words of others to guide us in our photography when we should work hard to discover our own style. I believe all magazine and on-line tutorials should always start with the words "In my opinion..."

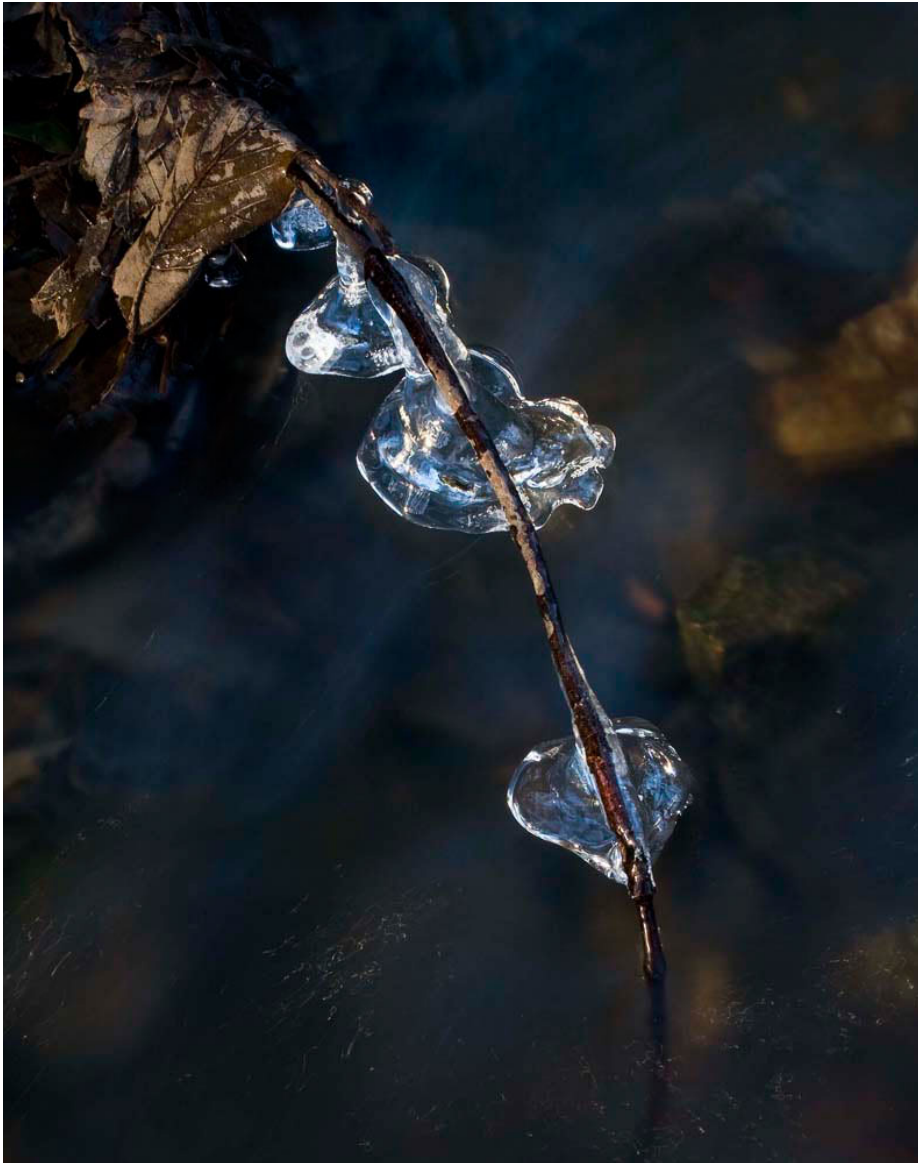
Another argument (of mine) is that of creativity versus documentation. Should we produce images that are only governed by our view of the scene as we take the shot or by the exposure value we chose and the post-processing of our raw files? If one only takes photographs to document a subject then surely one has to make an accurate exposure and avoid over-processing. If however we want our images to evoke something more than 'this is what I saw' then use of exposure value, filters and post-processing becomes inevitable. It therefore becomes a creative choice and the final image a tribute to that process. Ansel Adams completely re-worked his 'Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico' to give a far punchier and contrasty print so there's certainly no shame in re-interpreting the final image from a raw file.

So what am I trying to say with all this waffling? Put fairly simply – I'd like to see photographers thinking carefully about the tonality and use of the shadows in their final images.

Does your shade look like shade? Does the use of darker shadows allow the lighter areas to shine? Would underexposure create a far more interesting interpretation of the subject matter? Do the areas of shade and shadow create interesting negative spaces?







I hope I've made a reasonably good defence for my friend, the black pixel. It's been dealt a worrying blow from the photographic press, software programmers and camera manufacturers and needs all the love and support I, for one, can give it.

Perhaps my view will change over time but that is entirely up to me and it will not be down to the trends that many photographers seem compelled to follow.

I've included a small selection of photographs that show various attempts at the use of shadow and shade creatively. Some are drastically underexposed images, some use shadow to create mystery and drama, some are taken of subjects in shade, and some of just dark subject matter. All these images do contain some highlight elements but they rely on the darkness to bring them alive. Hopefully each image works in its use of shade and shadow but if you're not partial to the final results then I won't mind. It's purely personal taste and that is something we should all strive hard to hold on to. I've only made this case to counteract the slightly worrying trend I see in landscape photography.

Paul Moon works primarily in the Yorkshire Wolds and you can see more of his excellent photography at Paul Moon Photography or his Flickr stream

www.paulmoonphotography.co.uk

www.flickr.com/photos/moonimages

on landscape

Discuss this article

www.onlandscape.co.uk/2011/12/does-dark-matter

ROBERT WHITE

The Professional's Choice Since 1982

sharper. wider. faster.

The new Zeiss 15mm f/2.8 ZF.2 Distagon

The newest member of the SLR family, the Carl Zeiss Distagon T* 2,8/15 ZE and ZF.2 super wide angle lens, features a newly developed optical design and extends the range of the current SLR lenses, controlling distortion exceptionally well and producing naturally proportioned images. The robust all-metal barrel of the Distagon T* 2,8/15 is designed for decades of reliable service. A long focus rotation and buttery smooth action is perfect for photographers who want to take control of their picture making. The lens shade is integrated into the design and helps to protect the lens surface from unintentional damage. The 95mm filter thread accepts all standard filters, including the recently released Carl Zeiss T* UV and POL filters.

Call us on 01202 723046 for more details



Zeiss ZF.2 15mm f/2.8
£2,250

For more information and
up to date pricing call us on

01202 723046



Zeiss ZF.2
21mm f/2.8
£1,380



Zeiss ZF.2
25mm f/2.0
£1,272



Zeiss ZF.2
35mm f/1.4
£1,380



Zeiss SLR Lenses

(For Nikon and Canon cameras)*

| | |
|------------------------|--------|
| 15mm f/2.8 Distagon | £2,250 |
| 18mm f/3.5 Distagon | £1,026 |
| 21mm f/2.8 Distagon | £1,380 |
| 25mm f/2.0 Distagon | £1,272 |
| 25mm f/2.8 Distagon | £756 |
| 28mm f/2 Distagon | £939 |
| 35mm f/1.4 Distagon | £1,380 |
| 35mm f/2 Distagon | £817 |
| 50mm f/1.4 Planar | £531 |
| 50mm f/2 Makro Planar | £939 |
| 85mm f/1.4 Planar | £939 |
| 100mm f/2 Makro Planar | £1,380 |

* Prices based on Nikon-fit ZF.2 lens

Selling only the best brands: Zeiss, Voigtlander, Lee, B+W, Arca Swiss, Gitzo, Fogg, Leica, Schneider, Nikon and many more...

NOTE: ALL PRICES SHOWN INCLUDE VAT. E&OE

01202 723046

sales@robertwhite.co.uk

www.robertwhite.co.uk