

Newsletter

**BRACKNELL
CAMERA
CLUB**

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Editorial

By Ruari Cumming

As this is the “first” Newsletter of the season may I welcome all 20 new members. We hope you will find your membership both interesting, stimulating & rewarding. We have plenty of members to help you and give advice and

guidance - you only have to ask !

A few of us, including myself, recently ventured into London, to the National Theatre on the South Bank to view an exhibition of landscape photographs. This was the results of a photographic competition entitled “Landscape Photographer of the Year 2007”, the brainchild of Charlie Waite and backed by the AA & others. In case you didn’t know, Charlie Waite has been recognised for some years now as being at the forefront of landscape photography and is a popular speaker at camera clubs and photographic societies across the country. He is also closely involved, along with others, in a landscape and wildlife photographic tours organisation called “Light and Land”.

Anyway, the images on display, about 120 of them, were the winning selections from the 4 groups. The total prize fund was £20,000 and the winner took home a first prize of £10,000. The images were all stunning, and being a landscape photographer myself (yes, one who gets up at 4 a.m. to capture the dawn light !) I was truly inspired by everything I saw.

We were also fortunate that Charlie Waite himself was present during the late afternoon and were entertained by listening to him explain some of his philosophy about taking good and well considered landscape photographs. His anecdote filled talk was both interesting and informative.

On the way home we chatted about what ‘pearls of wisdom’ we had gleaned from Charlie Waite’s little talk. The rest of the group said they had learnt much, especially about graduated neutral density filters, tripods etc. However, when they had finished talking about these things, what was most gratifying, was when they said “But then, Ruari, you have been telling us all that for years !”



What makes a good photograph?

By Caroline Colegate

I guarantee in your mind you are already starting to answer this question; you will have your own set of criteria against which you will ‘judge’ whether a picture is good. Maybe you are saying it has to be sharp, well composed, have a good sense of composition and capture a feel good factor.

Okay, let me ask you a slightly different question. What makes a *successful* photograph ? Maybe there will be several different responses to this. Perhaps it’s the picture for which you have received many exhibition acceptances, perhaps the image that sold for a significant sum of money, maybe the photograph that reminds you of the best holiday you’ve ever had, maybe the capturing of the cheekiness of a grandchild, perhaps something that made it into a newspaper/magazine. I could go on, the list is endless.

So back to my original question, what makes a good photograph ? How many of you have the right answer ? Is there a right answer? Well, actually I think there is.....I believe that no matter how competitive we are as individuals we all like to do well from time to time. So can I assume that a good photograph is one that scores a 10 in a BCC quarterly competition ? Yes, some of you will be replying. So why did I not feel a glow of delight when a recent shot I took of Old Faithful geyser scored 10 in last seasons set subject competition ?



Those of you who know me well will say “but it was a good technical piece of work taken in one of my favourite places of the world.” The evening light was gentle showing superb texture in the water, the choice of lens ensured the frame was filled and you stood in the right position to get*/contd*

some dramatic backlighting. I even used this shot as my final slide in my AV show of Yellowstone National Park. Therefore it must be good. Well yes, I love the picture but I will argue that anybody with a good camera who stays at Old Faithful Village for a day or two could get the same shot. (After all if at first you don't succeed it will erupt again in another 90 minutes time !) Okay you might reply but the judge doesn't know how easy it is to take that shot. It may be the first time he has ever seen an evening shot of Old Faithful and like me be ecstatic about such marvels of geology. And there's my point a judge doesn't have the background knowledge about each image, they can only go on what a picture visually 'says' to them.

Judging is a very emotive and personal thing and yet we all have a tendency to place great emphasis on the mark a judge gives us. Why? Because we are conditioned, from a very early age, to rate success by point scoring. Don't get me wrong I'm not saying we should do away with competition nights but don't rate all your success on whether a judge scores your work highly. Maybe it's because I'm a judge that I can see beyond the marks. Last season I judged 14 competitions and if the average number of images in each was 50 then I commented on 700 pictures. Now there is no way that each image was unique and so one must expect that certain popular subjects will suffer from judging fatigue. This can manifest itself in two ways. One, familiarity will breed contempt and the judge will say not ABS (Another B***** Sunset!), and give it 5, or two; they may adore sunsets and give each one they judge a 10. So what happens ? Members who've been entering competitions for several years will naturally try to optimise their work to match particular judges preferences. And the result ? One stops doing photos for themselves and does things to suit the judge. Is this wrong ? Well, yes and no. Yes, I believe it's wrong to solely take photographs for a judge but no, it's not wrong to want to do well in competitions. It's a real dilemma; many circuit judges won't score a good moment in sport or a technically brilliant piece of architecture or new innovative pictures with high marks. What happens, many conform to the accepted norm and we don't enter these types of images and competition work stays static.

It's Catch 22. I believe this has a big effect on how we feel about our photography, continuously lower scores deject us, and we get stuck in a rut. So is there an answer? Yes, I believe there is. Perhaps try a small project to portray something that means a lot to you. Some of you may know that John Tyler is an avid cricket fan and so a while back he produced a small booklet of *his* favourite pictures called 'My First Eleven'.

I'm always happy for members to stand up on members evening and proudly show images that motivated *them*. Be confident to do what pleases *you* and to say, "this is *my* work, who cares if the judge doesn't appreciate it"? Be bold and try something different but above all *stop* judging the sole success of your photography on what club judges say. *Remember, entering competitions isn't the only outlet for your pictures and if you only remember one line from this article then please, let it be this one.*

Back to my Old Faithful shot and why I didn't feel that it's one of my most successful images. For me it had no particular message. What do I mean about message? Let me try to explain. I enjoy looking beyond the immediate visual impact of a picture. Is there a mood, story, or social message? For me it's these types of image that I am now trying to create. One of my

f a v o u r i t e pictures was of an Italian cemetery.

I managed to produce a print that 'said' everything I felt about the place.

Although shot on colour film the stones were predominately grey so I reduced the stones to monochrome. That left the flowers bright and highly saturated and although they showed life in the cemetery I felt it would be more in keeping with the subject matter if they were slightly more monochromatic. I could have chosen to show more stones but I wanted the viewer to connect closely with just one or two individuals just as one would if they were visiting the stone of a loved one. Perfect, my image was ready.....and the mark I got ?

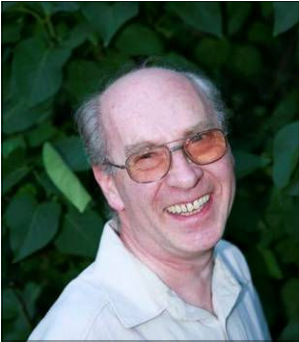
Wait for it5½ ! Did the mark change the way I felt about my image.... *no*.... not one bit. I have subsequently entered it into various exhibitions with varying degrees of success and I'll carry on showing it proudly to as many people as I can. For me it's one of my best images and no judge will ever take that feeling away. I love it and that's what really matters to me, not some judge who happens to be in a bad mood the night they judged at BCC. And yes, judges (including myself) have bad nights. I admit that on some occasions I have driven home and realised that I have given the wrong image the top marks.

So please get out there and produce images for your pleasure, as a judge I'd rather see images of which the photographer is proud

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and not ones that they think I would/should like. There is a time and place for all types of photography, explore as many as you can and don't let judges lull you into thinking that your work is worthless. And finally, returning to my original question, what makes a good photograph? Do you now have the right answer? Yes of course you do, it's the one that makes *you* feel proud.



Albany Cup

By Jeff Lawrence

In the last Newsletter I mentioned that we enter a print panel competition run by Windsor PS. This was an error & what I should have said was that we have been invited in previous years by Guildford Photographic Society to enter their Albany Cup Competition, which is for a panel of four prints by four different authors. For those unfamiliar with panels, this is a competition where the prints are selected to have a common theme and are marked both for their quality as individual pictures and also as to how well they fit the chosen theme.

In past years, the prints have been selected from our Internal Set Subject round entries and formatted afterwards to look like a set. As the standard of entries from the eight clubs competing is rather high, we only came 3rd last year (out of seven competing clubs). Discussing this on the way home after the competition, we (Ruari, Bruce and I) didn't think that we showed our club at its best and Ruari suggested that we should set out to produce a panel, specifically tailored for this competition, to which we agreed. This view was supported by the Club committee.

To start the ball rolling, we invited interested parties to come to a meeting and discuss what we might choose as a theme. Of the nine members who volunteered, only six were able to attend the first meeting but we did manage to talk through some options and ended up with four candidate themes, as set out below, with thanks to all attendees.

1. Use of water to create reflections, distortion or abstract images.
2. Stripes or stripy themes (can be wavy stripes).
3. The Four Elements (earth, air, fire, and water).
4. The Nature of Rock (so close-ups, patterns and abstracts rather than, say, views of a monument or rocky scenery).

What we also agreed was that we didn't want this to be an exclusive project but would open it up to all members to offer contributions. Initially these could be in the form of small prints or low-res digital images so that we can choose the direction to follow, rather

than the actual candidates for the competition. Accordingly, if anyone has anything to offer could they pass it to me at a club night, or send it by email and we'll include it in our progress reviews.

I should have said that we have been invited again for next year and, although the competition isn't held until March, we wanted to leave time for members to take images, especially while the weather allows, as well as to develop their ideas. So search through your collections for images that could fit the aforementioned themes or, even better, plan to take pictures with the themes in mind – they could also be useful for our internal competitions! I'd be particularly interested in images on the theme of Air, a topic I'm finding difficult to visualise.



Portfolio 2007/2008

By Chris Bradley

Having run the Bracknell Camera Club 'Portfolio' competition for fifteen years I think it is about time we dragged it, screaming, into the twenty-first century!

In the past it was a *slide only* competition where all entrants submitted one slide and the collection of slides was passed round to each entrant who duly marked them out of ten and made constructive and often funny comments about them. On or about the beginning of May we had a Portfolio evening and all slides were shown and comments read out.

With the onset of Digital photography and the consequent fall in the number of members who take slides, it was getting difficult to find enough people to select and enter quality images as slides, so in future I will be accepting digital images and slides. I can already hear the less adventurous amongst you saying that you either haven't gone over to the dark side and purchased one of those new fangled pixelated things or even that you think the quality of digital images is not as good as slides. Have no fear, if you only work in slide format, I will scan them and produce a good digital image of similar dimensions and quality as your original slide.

The way I intend to run the newly formatted competition is as follows:-

All images, whether slides or digital will be submitted on or before the last meeting of the year - generally the Christmas Party night. Digital images can either be sent to me at*/contd*

chrisandeb@tesco.net or given to me on a CD or USB pen drive and should conform to the same rules as for normal Projected Images competition, i.e. 1400 x 1050 pixels, in jpg or png format & in sRGB colour space. All images would then be available for viewing on the BCC website and a downloadable or hardcopy marking form would be provided. In the past, entrants without a computer, have resorted to viewing the images via library PCs and found the images too small for accurate diagnosis !....the Webmaster has promised to supply full screen images for viewing on the BCC website.

If you have any queries or constructive suggestions about the future running of this competition then please see me on Club night. As a reminder to the newer members, the Portfolio competition is open to any member and is a light-hearted look at other members' images and can be on **any** subject you like.....all we ask is that it is of normal competition standard of composition, focus etc.



Northumbrian Reminiscence

By Bruce Collins

You will know me as a proud supporter of my native North Country, so I was amazed to discover that Ruari, our leading landscape photographer, had never visited Northumberland, location of so many classic vistas of coast, castles, river and moor. I can't remember exactly how events unfolded but soon Ruari had booked a cottage by the coast and it was "go" for a photographic week in Northumberland.

It did not get off to a good start. I knew it was important to clean the sensor of my camera so the night before we set off I blasted my blower at the sensor, checked the image and discovered it was covered by a veritable starburst of muck! Alan Fretten told me off for buying a cheap blower, but was kind enough to give me a pre-breakfast cleaning tutorial before Ruari whisked me off to our first target – Anthony Gormley's "Angel of the North" which we photographed in harsh afternoon sunshine.

On arrival at the cottage, which had a superb location by Embleton beach, we decided not to waste lovely evening light unpacking the car but instead raced down to the dunes to give our cameras an early sight of Dunstanburgh Castle.

I am not, by nature, an early morning person, but I knew I had to respond to Ruari's 6am call next day to capture the dawn light on the castle. What I didn't know was that this involved scrambling,

stumbling & slithering over huge rounded boulders to get the best shots. My reward came months later when our Exhibition judge awarded me a trophy for the resulting print & also declared what a devilish spot it was to reach !

Moving to the south side of the castle & after a tasty crab sandwich in the tiny fishing harbour of Craster, we set off on a wonderfully exhilarating walk over the springy turf to line up shots of the castle with crashing waves sparkling in the foreground. Perfect...

Sunday's goal was Bamburgh where the early morning mist was just lifting as we tramped through the dunes to include atmospheric foreground of gently waving marram grass. During the day we acted as tourists in this pretty village & found the grave of Grace Darling, the lighthouse keeper's famous daughter. Later I suffered a grave misfortune when a dog snaffled my last sandwich during our cliff-top picnic. What an outrage. By evening time, as we stood by our tripods watching the light develop, we were aware of other photographers getting into position by our side, hoping to grab "our" shots. Another outrage !

Alnwick castle proved more elusive – they had built it the wrong way round to catch the light properly... and on an overcast Tuesday we tried to find something captivating in the rock pools & seaweed, cheering ourselves with seaside ice cream. The evening saw us at Warkworth, where riverside scenes of the castle were enhanced by warm sunshine. I even played with Ruari's clever Benbo tripod. Nice.

Ruari's study of the tide tables showed next day as the one for crossing the notorious causeway to Lindisfarne - Holy Island - complete with its priory ruins & magnificently situated castle. Blessed with glorious skies begging for use of the polarising filter and super-wide lens, we were glad of our wellies for getting into the best position. More award-winning pictures in the bag !

On Friday I thought we were simply to drive home, but no: Ruari gave me a yell & dashed off to the beach; I rubbed my eyes & stumbled down to find a beautifully clear sunny morning with glorious light glistening on the wet sand. We kept out of one another's shots, and I had strict instructions to walk below the tide-line to avoid leaving footprints in the pristine sands. (*These final moments were cleverly anticipated by Ruari in newsletter #58*). What a superb finish to a great week. This was the only "photography" holiday I had been on and it worked really well. I was able to hone my landscape appreciation at the hands of the Master & in return I was able to help Ruari get to grips with his transition from film to digital. I felt really pleased with the best of the shots I got, but now I am in two minds – I keep seeing similar pictures in every magazine I open. Does this mean I am the equal of the top photographers, or am I simply following everyone's clichéd path ?