

Newsletter

**BRACKNELL
CAMERA
CLUB**

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Editorial

By Ruari Cumming

A big welcome to all new members. We hope you are enjoying our evenings & that you will benefit from being a member of what is regarded one of the best & most progressive photographic clubs in the south. Should you have any questions or concerns then do please raise them with any committee member (that's those who wear name badges).

During the 15 years I have been a member I have seen numerous judges perform before us. Those who are prepared to tackle new & sometimes innovative, contemporary or just plain outlandish images are always welcome. Those who try hard to interpret or understand what the photographer is trying to put over will always be welcome at our club. That's not to say we don't want to see some *well crafted* images of landscapes, people or animals too, but they must be of the highest standard, both in technique & composition. Each to his own & all have a place in competitions. But what we need, and it is up to all of us to influence, is to make it clear that those judges who only have the ability to see & score nice non controversial "chocolate box" images are less welcome than they used to be.

Digital now influences not only what we photograph but how we present it on screen or print. That's good. It's progressive, dynamic & welcomed. We need to break out of the mould of only putting up those old clichéd images because we know that only old & hackneyed judges can cope with them.

Controversial? Yes, I am being controversial, if it's the only way to instigate changes in outlook.

An opportunity arises next month by attending the Judging Workshop being held by the SPF & it's open to all. I am going to it & hopefully many of you too will be there. Why not come along & see just how the SPF goes about selecting judges. If you think you could be better than those we see, then stand up and be counted. You can bet I will, at least until I'm thrown out!



Who'd be a judge?

By Caroline Colegate

No doubt many of you love to hate judges but deep down most of you will accept it's a difficult task. A judge is expected to have been everywhere in the world & recognise every landscape. They are expected to be able to name accurately every bird, butterfly and flower when faced with images of them. They also have to have a good knowledge of history, archaeology, anthropology & be able to instantly recognise that the abstract image placed before them is in fact a close-up of the edge of a spoon! It's therefore little wonder that very few people step forward to become a judge in fear that so many people will ridicule them.

Please remember the next time you criticise a judge they have given up their time to drive, perhaps, many miles through poor weather and all for free (unlike lecturers, judges are not allowed to charge a fee but they can claim petrol and mileage costs). I accept that some judges are a little jaded but the big problem is that very few people are coming forward to fill the gap of those who step down. Just ask Sue Matthews, who does an excellent job of booking our judges, just how short the list is. Maybe some people are put off by how frequently they would be asked to judge or how far they would have to travel but you set your own rules and can stipulate the maximum distance you are prepared to travel. I set my limit as a function of time rather than by miles. It's also up to you how frequently you judge, nobody says you *must* judge every week. I also try to plan my holidays well in advance and therefore I never accept any bookings for the whole of September because I know there will be a good chance that I'll be away for 2 of those 4 weeks.

The process of becoming a judge is very simple. You can either attend one of the Southern Photographic Federation (SPF)

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workshops or find a mentor (existing judge). If you attend a workshop you'll join a small group headed up by an existing judge and have the chance to practise and ask as many questions as you like. Later in the day you will be given about six prints and you will be asked to judge them as if you were at a club night. Three of the regions top judges will rate your performance and in due course you will be advised if you are successful. If successful, your name will appear on the 'B' list, which is included in the SPF Handbook that goes out to each club in the region every September.

If you take the mentor route your name will be added to the 'Preliminary' list and your mentor will accompany you when you judge and give you feedback and advice. In order to get onto the 'B' list you can either attend a workshop where your performance will be rated in the same way as above or you can ask three clubs for a reference and then apply to the SPF Council to go on the 'B' list. If anybody is interested or would like more information then please ask me.

I have personally found it to be a most rewarding experience. I get to see so many images & most clubs are genuinely warm and welcoming plus I've had one or two bizarre experiences thrown in. I recall the time Ruari and I visited Westonbirt Arboretum. We were photographing some leaves in close-up when a voice boomed out "good afternoon, you're from Bracknell aren't you". I quickly spun round thinking how could this guy know we were from Bracknell because neither of us was wearing our Bracknell Camera Club committee badges! "Yes" I replied rather hesitantly. "Ah yes" he said "I'm from Overton Camera Club, I remember you judged for us last year". I never did find out whether he remembered me because I gave him a 10 or whether he got the lowest score of the evening! I've also been accosted at the "Focus on Imaging" Exhibition at the NEC. One almost starts to feel famous! The other advantage is that you are free to reward images that break the so-called rules. If a person, placed right on the edge of an image, adds something to the story or mystery of a picture then you can say so. One can reward something that has broken with tradition. I have found that it has helped to change my outlook on photography; I am no longer looking for a 'pretty picture' but one that tells a story or conveys a deep feeling for a location. I believe that it has deepened my appreciation of different types of photography. I always try to talk about the picture in front of me rather than the one that I would have taken. This always goes down well with the audience and of course I get a big kick out of being asked back to a club, that's my measure of success.

The next SPF judging workshop takes places on Sunday 2nd November, 10.30a.m. at the Littleton

Millennium Memorial Hall, Winchester at which I have been asked to do a presentation about my experiences of being a judge. If you book a ticket before 20th October the cost will only be £8 but tickets purchased after that date will be £10. Application forms & full details are by the notice board. It would be fantastic if some of you could come along to this event, there would be no pressure to become a judge. Many people attend these events just to see what judging is all about. Therefore, by attending you'll not be committing yourself to anything that you may be unsure about. Of course I would be delighted if anybody wanted to come along with the thoughts of being formally assessed. It's my personal objective to recruit some new judges for the SPF, but I am not going to pressurise anybody into something that's not right for them. After all, it's unlikely that anybody who isn't committed to the task would make a suitable judge. I am sure many of you sit through competitions judging, commenting in your own mind about the images on display. If so, then you are already a potential judge!

I therefore urge you to consider it more seriously. I remember when I first considered judging I thought what right have I as a mere LRPS to critique work of people who could be FRPS standard. Thanks to the encouragement from several people I was made to understand that my opinion was just as good as anybody else's, *and so is yours*.

Remember, the SPF needs more judges and this means *you*, please give it some serious consideration, thank you.



Big Cat Day

By Cecil Chapple

The weather forecast promised sunny spells & showers so I packed my waterproofs. I decided to take my laptop to download my pictures at lunchtime. My camera is a Sony Alpha 100 with a Tamron 28-300 Tamron XR Lens. I was also carrying a monopod with quick release plate, spare battery & memory cards. Ruari picked me up in Harmanswater then it was round to Martins Heron to pick up Sue Matthews & Alan Fretten. With Alan navigating we arrived at the Wildlife Heritage Foundation site near Ashford in Kent. The animals, some from circuses, are housed in wire mesh cages surrounded by waist high safety fences. We were allowed to go in between the safety fence & the cage.

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After a safety briefing we went to see three male lions who were released from their sleeping quarters to have the meat left in their compound. This cage had portholes in the mesh that could be unlocked to allow access by a camera lens. The mesh was big enough to allow the smaller lens to be pushed through. Most of the

animals ignored the noise of our cameras, even when Alan fired off a continuous burst of frames. We moved on to a Cheetah cage, one of the largest, where an athletic young lady ran round the cage carrying a shoulder of beef. This was to encourage the Cheetah to sprint across the caged enclosure. Unfortunately my panning technique was not up to the task.

Our next stop was at a cage with two Bengal Tigers who seemed quiet until one annoyed the other, then it was snarls with flashing teeth & exposed claws. We



adjourned for the included lunch, which we were taking in a marquee when we heard the rain outside.

The highlight of the afternoon was the visit to the Amur (Siberian) tiger. Amur tigers are the largest of the tigers, which was demonstrated by our guide who tempted one to stand upright. We had our cameras up against the mesh one time & a tiger walked up & tapped his nose on the other side, we were a few inches from a large tiger. The guide told as that sometimes when they are offering a titbit to a tiger the tiger catches their fingers but soon releases them.



Later in the afternoon the rain stopped and the sun came out. The combination of sunlight and wet animal coats gave some interesting lighting.



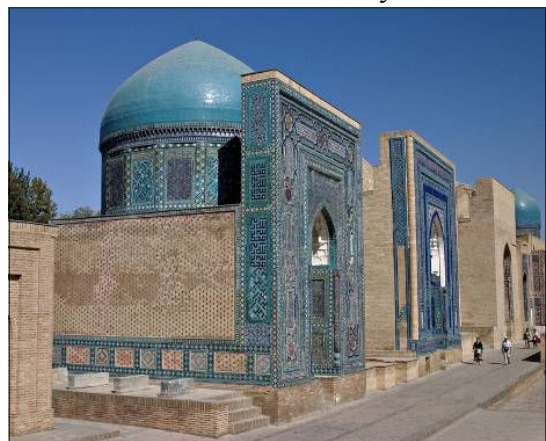
Samarkand

By Peter Ellis

Peter continues his trilogy of travels in Central Asia

Travelling west from Tashkent the road to Samarkand traverses field after field of cotton. Soviet planners turned Uzbekistan into a vast plantation supplying 70% of the USSR's cotton. It is still the world's second largest cotton exporter and this thirsty crop has resulted in huge environmental damage in some areas, especially in and around the Aral Sea. When the irrigation and the cotton fields end the landscape soon becomes bare, rolling, rocky hills with small villages & the occasional roadhouse. At one such stop an enquiry was made as to the availability of a WC. Our guide informed us that an outhouse was indeed situated behind the premises but strongly recommended that it be avoided, suggesting that the surrounding bushes were far preferable. And so it was to be for the rest of the trip. Comfort breaks were taken when vegetation or rock formations permitted, gentlemen always to the left, ladies to the right.

Passing through the small villages & towns, the coach always attracted attention especially amongst the children who, unfailingly, waved enthusiastically. Even in the humblest of towns the schoolchildren were immaculate in their white and navy uniforms, the girls' hair often tied up with large bows. And without exception, the smartest, most impressive building in the area was always the local school, showing how important education is taken in this country.



Sha-I-Zinda mausoleums

Modern Samarkand is a sprawling, nondescript city with a population of around 400,000 and is markedly less/contd

cosmopolitan than Tashkent. You immediately notice the long, dark red dresses and trousers of the women and the variety of headwear amongst the men. First impressions notwithstanding, the city contains some absolute gems for the photographer. The beautiful Shah-I-Zinda mausoleums to the north east of the city is where 14th Century rulers buried their family and favourites and it is said to contain the grave of a cousin of the prophet Mohammed. The exquisite blue tile work is offset by dazzling white stucco and khaki-coloured brickwork.



Ladies of Samarkand

Not far from the Shah-I-Zinda is the enormous Bibi Khanum mosque built by one of the greatest rulers of central Asia, Timur (or Tamerlane) whose 14th Century empire stretched from Turkey in the west to the borders of China in the east. This was one of the Islamic world's largest and most magnificent mosques yet within years of its completion parts of it had started to crumble, its construction having pushed contemporary building techniques to their limits. An earthquake in 1897 hastened the eventual collapse, and renovation started in the 1970's is still underway.

Next door to the Bibi Khanum lies Samarkand's main bazaar. Fruit stalls piled high with peaches, apricots, figs & pomegranates. Nearby stalls offer a myriad choice of spices & mounds of the local *non* bread, much praised by the locals but too tough for my taste. As was generally

The case in Uzbekistan the locals are more than happy to be photographed, the kids especially who often shyly line up to try out their four or five sentences of English. To the south of the city, the Gur Emir mausoleum contains, under a solid block of dark green jade, the tomb of Timur who died in 1405. Its beautiful blue cupola is complemented by the exterior decoration of the walls consisting of geometrical designs and inscriptions made out of blue, light-blue and white tiles. As this site was conveniently close to our hotel I took my camera and lightweight tripod to the site one evening to take photographs of the dramatically lit buildings. I came again to Gur Emir at dawn the following day to complete the set of photographs of this beautiful historic building.

The Registan, situated at the heart of Samarkand, must surely rate as being the most magnificent example of Islamic architecture in Central Asia. Once described as "the noblest public square in the world" and dating from 1417 to 1636, this ensemble buildings consists of three madrassahs (Islamic colleges) located on three sides of a square. 18th century regional troubles resulted in the serious decline & decay of these impressive buildings but Soviet restoration work has gone a very long way to restoring them to their original splendour. Amongst the myriad decorations and epigraphic inscriptions, one of the buildings, the Sher Dor madrassah, is



Sher Dor Madrassah

decorated with tiger-like animals (actually meant to be lions), thus curiously flouting the Islamic prohibition against the depiction of live animals. Our visit to the Registan was in the late afternoon and many of the building were disappearing into the shade making photography less than ideal. However, the soft late afternoon light beautifully complimented those building still in the sunlight. Samarkand had definitely lived up to expectations & we now looked forward to our next destination, the country's second most famous old city, Bukhara.

Peter Ellis will concluded his travelogue in the next issue when he tells us of Bukhara.



Gur Emir Mausoleum