



# Newsletter

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## Editorial

By Ruari Cumming

Despite my advancing years and having never had any guidance as to what an "Editorial" should contain, I find magazines seem to list only the articles they contain, which to me seems a missed opportunity. So I try to use these six issues yearly to express some thoughts or observations which I feel may be of interest, or even amuse readers.

I see this is my 35th Newsletter since taking over the job in August 2004 - good lord, that's nearly 6 years ago. A plea to you all. I am now out of contributing articles from members, so please get your dexterous digits flying across your keyboard & produce an article for the next issue, due out in mid May.

Normally, at this time of year I tell about my forthcoming "Spring into the Sun" family holiday. But at time of writing, the threatened BA strike is likely to scupper our visit to Punta Umbria on the Costa de la Luz.

My judging exploits seem to be well received & repeat bookings surely indicate that clubs enjoy my lighthearted approach. We (BCC) would like to see more new judges on the circuit and we have, within our club, many members who could do an admirable job. And on that subject, well done to Peter Handford for his recent qualification as a S.Fed judge. Glad you have joined us, Peter.

Whilst in "congrats" mode, I must thank all those members who have said how much they enjoyed my presentation, "The Island Dream". I was fearful that, as in the movie industry, the sequel wouldn't be as good as the original. But it seems my fears were misguided. In fact four clubs booked it even before it was completed, so I was very much "on edge" as to how it would be received that night! And with ten bookings for both shows, I see I will be a busy lad this coming winter!

Many of you have said you want a special AV group set up & whilst I am happy to be a member of that group, I'm afraid I am just too busy to organise it, so let's be having a volunteer please.



## We Are Sailing...

By Bruce Collins

Since retiring, I have been lucky enough to come across three yachtsmen who have asked me to crew for them, and thus a whole new dimension has opened up in my life - and all for the price of an occasional mooring fee and a few beers for the skipper.

My latest and greatest voyage came about when Alan wanted to fulfil his ambition to sail around the coast of Britain, starting from his base on Chichester Harbour. He invited me to join him on the leg covering my beloved North Country, starting at Scarborough. On meeting there, we got off to a great start when the pub we dined in turned out to be hosting a ceilidh band with a very spirited fiddle player.

The first day's sailing took us past pretty Robin Hood's Bay to Whitby, with splendid views of the Abbey standing proudly atop the cliffs - the first of many occasions when I saw familiar landmarks from a new angle.



Whitby is packed with photo opportunities of course, but I was not prepared to see local lads performing spectacular dives from a 20 foot pier into some five feet of water! It certainly impressed the girls looking on.



Strong winds stopped us leaving harbour for the next three days - so we behaved as tourists; taking a bus ride (free on our passes) over the moors to Goathland (now re-branded as Heartbeat's "Aidensfield") with a woodland walk to Mallyon Spout, lunching at the tiny pub at Beck Hole: basic in the extreme and

unchanged in over eighty years.

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Back in Whitby, the Station Inn gave us a great Rock & Roll night - we were warming to the place. Next day, the North York Moors Railway took us by steam through the moors to Pickering. We eventually left Whitby for Roker, a classic seaside resort at the mouth of the River Wear, having passed picturesque Staithes, so well loved by photographers. Next day took us past the Tyne to Blyth & an early night because, to quote from the Captain's Log: *"To be at the Farne Islands at slack water meant leaving at 04:30. This was an added bonus for Bruce who is a keen photographer and is always banging on about early morning light."*



What nonsense! Those who know me at all will know that I might respect early morning light in theory but certainly not in practice; I have however learnt to fall in with skipper's orders, rewarded by stunning views of Dunstanburgh Castle (above) and Bamburgh Castle (right), the Farne Islands & finally Lindisfarne (Holy Island).



I had pictured these three years earlier, on a Northumbrian photo holiday with Ruari, but they present quite a different aspect when seen from the sea. Another difference was that the shots were taken not from a tripod but from a yacht rolling in heavy swell with a 300 mm lens, so a speed of 1/3000 second was chosen. A pretty severe challenge for the image stabilisation system, I felt. This superb day was capped off by a magical night at anchor in the bay off Holy Island. All the way up the Northumbrian coast we had seen squadrons of puffins whizzing to and fro; now we had grey seals posing for us. Bliss...

Holy Island presented constantly changing perspectives, backed by the Cheviot Hills, as we left next morning in clear sunshine, but drama lay ahead. Beyond Berwick we encountered a thickening fog bank, nearly coming to grief entering Eyemouth. While considering our options, the fog disappeared within minutes, we moored safely & made a dash for the nearest bar to recover. Eyemouth was a charming blend of working fishing harbour & old-time seaside, with cottages huddled together in tiny streets & a fine local museum. It was to be the last harbour of my trip. Alan continued his voyage via the Caledonian Canal to the Clyde, and I caught the train back home.



## Dos Amigos!

By Richard Reynolds

Or "Death Valley in December". Last year just before the Christmas madness, Toby Haskins and I managed to sneak away to Death Valley for 3 days plus a bit of travelling time either end.

Day 1: landed in Las

Vegas mid afternoon and bizarrely the airplane seemed to taxi right up to the hotels on 'the Strip'. Smoothly through baggage, customs and car rental and we were heading west in a monster of a GMC 4x4. Driving round Mt Charleston in the early evening light and with Joshua Trees to boot was too much temptation. Despite having a suitcase full of desert ready gear we decided to get out of the warm truck and into the surprisingly cold, windy and dusty terrain in smart clothes! First night in Parhump (yes that is correct).



Day 2: Up very early and drove into Death Valley national park to be at Zabriskie Point before dawn. Pity no one told the weather that there was supposed to be a fantastic sunrise that morning. In fact the entire western half of the US was being hit



by snow storms! After a brief stop at the visitor centre at Furnace Creek we headed on to check in to our motel at Stovepipe Wells. Far

from luxurious but with a view of the Mesquite Dunes we weren't complaining. That afternoon we tried to drive to Mt Whitney in California, the amount of snow ploughs we saw going the same way we were should have given us a clue. As we approached the last mountain range to get there the whole world turned white and stayed white, annoyingly so at the grand vista we had planned for sunset, until we got back into Death Valley. We had to console ourselves with a hike in Mosaic Canyon. Such is life!

Day 3: Positively a lie-in this morning as the dunes were only a couple of miles away. The Mesquite dunes were surprisingly high and cut a fine picture against the backdrop of the Panamint Mountains.



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Despite the storms raging all around, Death Valley was cloudless and the sunrise didn't disappoint, turning first the mountains red and then the dunes



gold. After breakfast we headed north to the Ubehebe Crater, which as you pull up to the

rim gives you one of those WOW moments. At 2,400 wide & 500 feet deep it's a pretty impressive hole in the ground. A mixture of black volcanic sand and red rock that was incredibly picturesque all the way down. Not quite so lovely on the lung busting climb out on the shifting black grit!

Day 4: This morning at Zabriskie Point the

w e a t h e r didn't let us down and the sunrise gave a fantastic colour and texture to the amazing rock



formations. We spent the rest of the day winding our way south through the main valley past such geological marvels as 'The Artists Palette', where the rocks are bright green and purple, to the 'Devils Golf Course', where the salt formations make it near impossible to walk on.



Late afternoon saw us pull in to the car park at 'Badwater Basin', wondering why everyone was taking a picture of the rock behind us, until we saw the plaque some 282ft up that said 'Sea Level'! Very few people venture past the boardwalk and out onto the salt flats

where you are treated to acre upon acre of salt formations. Standing in the middle of the salt flats waiting for the sun to set (or disappear behind the mountains) you could literally feel yourself being dried out, & that wasn't in August! Then back to the nerve jangling juxtaposition that is Las Vegas in the desert.

Death Valley is a magnificent natural park and mainland America's largest at 3 million acres. December is a great time to visit but the temperature range from minus 11 to plus 18 degrees Celsius never lets you forget it's a desert!



## Telling Stories

By Eileen Riley

In the week or so leading up to the club meeting that questions 'Did the Judge Get it Right?', it occurred to me to explain why I never give the judges chance to get it wrong!

Most of my photographs come from trips to far-flung lands, often at the back of beyond. The images that mean most to me contain some essence of those places, their wildlife and their people. They frequently contain a story that no-one else could guess, and I cannot bear the thought of a judge inventing a story around one of my pictures. I do derive pleasure from showing photographs in the club's annual exhibition, where the judge may have more time, and visitors can browse as they wish. It pleases me if someone enjoys my work, but I have no competitive interest.

This article explains three of my photographs, all of which were in the 2009 exhibition: one about a small boy, one about an old lady and some children, and one about a monkey.

Let's start with the small boy. In September 2009, we visited Peru. The boy lives by the huge Madre de Dios River, which runs eastwards from the Andes and eventually joins the Amazon. It would take you three days to reach his home near the Manu Biosphere: a long day to get to Lima, an early flight next morning to Cusco in the Andes and a day's driving north-eastwards in a 4WD vehicle on a dirt track down to the river system where the road ends, then a day flying fast downstream by motorised canoe. For the last stage, we picked up our cook and supplies for our four night stay at the Amazon Manu Lodge. 'Supplies' included everything: gas for cooking, petrol for the outboard engine, drinking water, food, beer.

The isolated Lodge has four twin-bedded chalets, with communal dining room and kitchen. Alan and I, our friend Gerald, and our Peruvian guide Alex had it to ourselves. The caretakers for the Lodge are a local couple - where 'local' means indigenous. They are members of the Machigengua rainforest tribe. Rather than remaining isolated, this tribe chooses to interact with the main population in Peru, and in some areas is politically active. Indeed, rainforest is a hot topic for several reasons. The family includes a small boy and his little sister. It was an amazing experience to meet them. I cannot imagine what happens about education or healthcare. ..../contd

Quote - Unquote

*"You don't take a photograph, you make it"*

.....Ansel Adams



The children play together by the huge, fast-flowing river, knowing nothing different. I never knew their names. It is hard to believe the child had never seen a camera before, but he ignored it, and was not interested in seeing his image in the screen - or maybe was unaware of the possibility.

The second story is about a monkey. You may well look at this photograph and think 'OK, it's just a



monkey at a zoo.' You would be wrong. It is not just any old monkey. He is a Red-shanked Douc Langur, and he lives in the Endangered Primate Rescue Centre (EPRC) at Cuc Phuong National Park, a slow five-hour drive southwest of Hanoi, Vietnam. His species is endangered. It struck me that he, as an individual, is in captivity for the benefit of his species through no choice of his own. Douc Langurs are indigenous to Indochina. The EPRC is dedicated to the rehabilitation, breeding, research, conservation of endangered primates, & to the protection of their habitats. Its residents include the critically endangered Delacour's Langur, which is indigenous to Vietnam. Only around 300 individuals survive in the wild. We were lucky to see a family of around ten of them at Van Long Lake, too far away to photograph.

For more information about the EPRC and photographs of primates, visit [www.primatocenter.org](http://www.primatocenter.org)

The third story was at a Buddhist festival at the small isolated village of Ura in central Bhutan. Ura is at about 3200m altitude, and in April was still cold. We wanted to include the festival in our schedule, but there is no accommodation in the area so we arranged to camp. The festival takes place annually at the monastery. Monks of all ages, and some young women, dress up in bright silk costumes and headdresses and perform traditional dances. It is hard for Westerners to understand what is going on. The dances relate to the annual cycle of life in the farming community, fertility, and the involvement of ancient deities which seem all mixed up with Buddhism. Unlike at festivals in the towns of Paro and Thimpu in the more accessible west of Bhutan, there were few tourists. We were welcomed into the monastery itself and addressed by one of its leaders, Dr Lopen Karma Phuntsho, who studies and works in England for part of the year. He is a personal friend of our guide.

Life in rural Bhutan is hard. Ura has no electricity, and no running water. It is very cold in winter, with heavy snowfall. I called this photograph 'Contrasts...' because I was struck by several incongruities in the image: the old lady gazing at the spectacle that she had doubtless witnessed many times in her life, the small children who were watching but also interested in the packets of snacks; one child in western dress, the others in traditional dress. And the litter on the ground. I have noticed in cultures where the climate and lifestyles are hard that older people look older than they really are, while youngsters look younger.



At the exhibition, Alan overheard a visitor saying that he would have cropped everything out and made the photograph of the old lady - of course, but that would be another story.

There are more images and stories about some of our trips at [www.sohaila.org.uk](http://www.sohaila.org.uk), and some of my stuff at [www.eileen.sohaila.org.uk](http://www.eileen.sohaila.org.uk).