



Newsletter

**BRACKNELL
CAMERA
CLUB**

Issue
Number

77

May
2010



Editorial

By Ruari Cumming

Our season is nearly over and with a week or so to go, I awake during the night in a cold sweat, as the nightmare of BA cabin crew strikes and volcanic ash clouds loom on the horizon of our forthcoming break to Venice - a dream

of a city which we have not been back to since 1983. No it won't have changed much. That, of course, is the whole point. In these times of change, it is most enjoyable to return to a place you know. You settle in & unwind quickly, finding your "break away" is starting to yield benefits before you have even bought your first bottle of beer and realised that one thing has changed over the 27 years - prices !!

Life wouldn't be the same if we couldn't cope with change. We have a change of Government and hope that DC & NC can make less of a lash of things than their predecessor ! And change comes to us all, whatever walk of life we lead. Even in photographic circles we need change. As a club we need to see a big turnaround in the quality of images we enter in the external competitions. We need some pretty creative images too - we all need to move away from "safe" snaps to more thought provoking images, those where the photographer has "thought outside the box", or "off the wall" or call it what you will.

We have a marvelous reputation as one of the best clubs in the South East, demonstrated by our waiting list for membership. But can we beat the other clubs in competitions, can we hell ! We know one of the reasons is an annual decline in the number of pictures in our Exhibition - a pool for our selection committee in the past. And while that committee spend the summer finding ways for us to improve, we now need, more than ever, a vast bank of stimulating, creative and mind blowing images. They don't need to have been seen before either, nor do they need to be anything more than rough or trial shots to select from. If selected then we would want them produced to competition standards, but don't worry over that yet. Please, please search your images or take some snaps this summer that will make me go "Wow !"

A View from the Chairman's bath

By Stuart Skelsey

A h , l o v e l y . Surrounded by hot water, steam rising and swirling, lifting ones thoughts to higher things while lighter-than-water bits bob around. Let me share some soapy ponderings with you.

There is a strand of thought within the club that the work being produced by members is less enterprising than that seen in the past. Various reasons are put forward; the influence of digital technology, the reduction in the number of entries allowed in competitions and the growth in club membership. It is worth thinking a little about each of these items in turn, with the idea that, if we accept the initial proposition, we can learn what we might be able to do to counteract this tendency, to the benefit of our combined photographic practice and future health of the club.

I have always been a digital worker. In fact, if I am honest, photography really only grabbed my full attention once it went digital and the price point reached a level where I could actually afford it of course. So comments to the effect that digital was a paradigm changing technology in the photographic world fell somewhat on deaf ears; I had only ever worked in one way so had nothing to compare it to. But I am starting to wonder if that analysis by experienced commentators may have some validity.

Digital costs are all up front. In other words, once I have purchased the necessary technology, I can take as many images as I like without having to factor in the cost implications. Different with film of course, where there is a cost associated with the purchase of (non-reusable) stock and its subsequent processing. This is a wonderful freedom, I have not met anyone who would wish to return to those old ways, but that very freedom can also promote a certain sloppiness in the unwary. It can be all too easy to end up with 25 very average shots of a subject rather than one



...../contd

very good one; a mindset of ‘take a bunch of shots and one is bound to be ok’ becomes the norm rather than the thoughtful, studied press of the shutter that was more common when each click had a cost associated with it. And what good photographers thought about, before taking the shot, was ‘what do I want to say in this image?’. It could be that is what we are in the process of losing and what differentiates the top class shot from the rest.

Within the digital world, post-processing looms large in the workflow of any photographer and that computer-based capability provides us with a wealth of opportunity that we would now find difficult to relinquish. Returning to the wet darkroom is not an option. Once again this remarkable technology carries with it a certain danger for the average practitioner and I include myself in that bracket.

We have all heard the comment ‘I can fix that in Photoshop’, and probably used it ourselves if we are honest, when we probably should be heeding the advice to ‘get it right in camera’. Getting it right in camera is what differentiates us from computer jockeys.

The power of software also delivers the siren call of the next best technique, the next faddish look to be copied, where the obvious danger is that we become jack-of-all-trades and master of none. Once again, a trend that seeks to deliver an average final product unless we are careful.

With the increase in the number of club members, and the consequent increase in competitive entries for the print and projected image league rounds, there was a necessary reduction in the number of entries allowed per member. Just three or four seasons ago we could put three images into each competition night, and I well remember perhaps selecting two images that were ‘bankers’, within my limited and usually erroneous definition of the term, and use the third to try something a bit different. It was interesting to see how often the speculative image did well in the judge’s eyes. With just one opportunity to score nowadays, the default can become the safe selection each time, unless you are aware of the tendency and work hard to overcome it. Much easier to take this approach if you have a couple of decades of experience under your belt and can afford to be ‘playful’, not so easy if you are just starting to make your way in the club photography world and need to establish your position, learn the rules as it were.

Which brings us to judges . . . but the water is getting cold, so perhaps another time.

The intent of this article was encourage members to think about their photographic practice and to raise their awareness of when there is pressure on them, arising from the environment in which we

work, to deliver the average image, the ‘that’ll do’ product. A clarion call to reject the unexceptional, if you like. I believe we would all like to see continued growth in our joint photographic practice and to the upward progression of our club.

Now, where is that loofah . . .



A Passage to India

By Peter Ellis

A Civil Service, a railway network, a parliamentary system and many fine colonial buildings are some of the legacies of British rule in India. An often overlooked legacy is the rule for driving on the left-hand side of the road. Most of the time that is. A recent holiday to northern India allowed me the opportunity to witness this fact of life and I would like to share the following associated observations with you.

In most if not all the countries I have visited the accelerator and brake pedal are the most important of a car’s controls. In India it is the horn. In fact, I would venture to propose that it would be impossible to drive on Indian roads without a horn. Without brakes, yes, many appear to do just this. But without a horn, impossible, as the following example illustrates. On coming up behind another coach or lorry our coach driver would immediately start honking the horn to alert the other driver to our presence. The honking would increase significantly in vigour and volume once overtaking had commenced. It would then reach a veritable cacophony to inform the partly-overtaken vehicle that it now needed to slow down pretty damn quickly and leave us space to move in because a large Tata truck is hurtling towards us on the other side of the road. Less urgency was noted if the oncoming vehicle was a rickshaw or a cyclist who, of course, can always head for the ditch when push comes to shove. As far as I could tell this approach to road-craft is employed by all Indian drivers.

Some other interesting observations. No significant slowing down is necessary when turning corners, and clipping the apex of the corner, racing-style, is mandatory for all right-hand turns. The only sentient beings in the universe for whom you should even consider giving way to or not hitting are cows. Trucks and coaches performing four-point turns on dual-carriageways appears to be permitted as does driving the wrong way down the hard shoulder of said carriageways

...../contd

when that would allow you to reach your destination faster. Women are exempt from wearing crash helmets (on religious grounds) when being a passenger on a moped/scooter/motorbike as indeed are the two, three children riding between Mum and Dad. Father is obliged by law to wear a helmet, except when he doesn't. The concept of giving way or allowing someone out of a side road is unknown and the rules regarding priority on roundabouts defeated me. One evening we were taken to an event by car which meant that we experienced the traffic without the height and protection normally provided by our coach. I have never experienced such terror before. Cars, scooters, rickshaws, pedestrians, and cyclists appeared from all directions and disaster seemed inevitable – I made most of the journey with my eyes closed. And yet, encountering traffic conditions like this, continually, throughout our time in India I did not witness a single accident. Those 330 million Hindu deities must have something to do with it.



Tata - kings of the road

However, perhaps the best example I can give you of the audacity required to be an Indian driver, particularly on meeting an obstruction, is as follows. Your coach

has stopped behind a small number of other vehicles waiting for a level crossing to open. A few more vehicles have joined the queue behind you. A tuk-tuk driver, sensing an opportunity for a quicker getaway, has driven down the outside of the queue and is now parked, at the front, in the other lane. Other tuk-tuk drivers, sensing an advantage has been gained over them, join him in the other lane, as does a local bus, three cars and three trucks. From this point on the queue continues to grow like a virus, spreading across the whole road. The queue is now over 100 meters long and at least five vehicles wide. The road is blocked in both lanes. You find this somewhat amusing until the dawning realization that the same phenomenon has take place on the far side of the level crossing.

The traffic queues on both sides are now like opposing armies ranged in front of each other. The barrier is eventually raised and the tuk-tuks in pole position on your side of the crossing go for it, as do the corresponding vehicles on the other side of the crossing. They meet in mid-track and stop. Instant gridlock ensues. There is only one logical solution to this - everybody hits the horn. For what seems like an eternity your coach is stuck on the middle of the crossing - you and your fellow passengers look

nervously up and down the track wondering when the next Agra-Jaipur express is due. The Indian drivers stuck with you on the crossing look remarkably unfazed. This is either because they know the next train is not due until Thursday or they face the uncertainty with equanimity, their Hindu faith offering them the chance of reincarnation and a job in a Vodafone call centre in Mumbai.

And then, progress, of a kind. Two policemen have appeared to sort this out. Their technique for doing this is to belabour the moped and rickshaw drivers with their long, shiny batons. They do not belabour the cars, buses or trucks as this would damage their long, shiny batons. Eventually, sensing their contributions are in vain, they lose interest and disappear as swiftly as they came and leave the situation to organically sort itself out, which eventually it does. All that horn blowing has done the trick. No road rage was evident throughout, no voices were raised, no finger-signs flashed and no one got hurt, except by the police. Were it not for the horns we'd still be there, or under the front carriage of the next Agra-Jaipur express. The horn is the most important control in an Indian car - QED.

This being an article for a camera club newsletter I suppose I should say something more photographically relevant and describe the trips itinerary if only briefly. Our outbound flight took us to Delhi but the following morning we flew to Nepal for a three day stay in Kathmandu. Sounds exotic, doesn't it? The truth of the matter is that Kathmandu is, as they say, a city of two halves. Modern Kathmandu is a scruffy, charmless place not improved by the strike of rubbish collectors that was taking place when we were there. The rolling power cuts don't help either. Regrettably, the country, poor by any standards to begin with, seems to be going down the tubes under the current Maoist government. The old, historic part of the city is a different matter with many wonderful palaces, temples and other architectural treasures. In these areas the attentions of the street hawkers selling postcards & other souvenirs



Everest Cloud Plume

prepared us for the onslaught we were to meet later in India. Oh, & the flight up to see Everest & the rest of the Himalayas was pretty impressive, too. .../contd

A flight back to India took us to Varanasi for two nights but not before we experienced five body searches at Kathmandu airport. Air travel between the two countries has been problematic since an airline hijacking in 1999. Varanasi, a city of 3 million on the Ganges has been a cultural and religious centre for several thousand years and is probably most famous for the *ghats* where bathing, religious and cremation activities occur. An early morning boat ride on the Ganges is the mandatory tourist experience. A short flight then took us to Khajuraho, a small town now famous for its Hindu temples and their, amongst other things, erotic sculptures dating back to medieval times. The temples are of sandstone construction and were put together using mortise and tenon joints and held in place by gravity. These beautiful monuments are

the choice of either a swaying elephant ride or a bone-shaking ride in clapped-out jeeps. Needless to say we took the latter – the poor elephants did not appear to be treated that well.



The “Baby Taj”

So, there you have it. The weather in late January was wonderfully mild (mid to high 20’s) making sightseeing very easy work. First-timers in India, like me, find the place mind-blowing. The contrasts in living standards is staggering, the pollution, air and other, in some parts of the country is eye-opening, the sheer number of people in the cities hard to take in. Yet India also provides sights of breathtaking beauty. And apart from those pesky street hawkers the Indians we met from all walks of life, were gracious and friendly. And problems of a digestive nature? Well, I think we’ll leave that for another newsletter. But the Kingfisher beer was excellent.



Taj Mahal



The Varanasi Ghats

listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site & reminded me of a much smaller and quieter Angkor Wat in Cambodia.

A ride on the Shatabdi Express train then took us on to Agra where the highlight is, of course, the Taj Mahal. We chose to visit this in the early morning before the crowds arrived and we had the opportunity to photograph this most beautiful building in the soft, misty morning light. The rest of the day was taken up visiting the Agra Fort, another World Heritage site and perhaps the most important fort in India, and the exquisite *I’timad-Ud-Daulah*, sometimes known as the “Baby Taj” which contains many design elements used in the later construction of the Taj Mahal itself. The final destination was Jaipur, some six hours from Agra by road. The “Pink City” is the capital of the state of Rajasthan and appears to be prospering with much new office building taking place and modern industries moving into the city. The old city was originally painted pink in 1876 to welcome the Prince of Wales and it remains this colour today. Well, sort of.

Perhaps the most interesting of the visits here was to the Amber Fort located 11 km from Jaipur. Built in the sixteenth-century on the remnants of earlier structures this impressive citadel is set high on a hill & contains elements of both Muslim & Hindu interior architecture. To reach the fort the visitor has

This Newsletter.....

.....is published six times a season, from August to May. Contributions are always welcome & in fact needed. Articles, with pictures, should ideally be of a photographic nature, but not necessarily if you have a particular story to tell or a scene to set. If you have a contribution to make, however large or small, then please see the Editor for more details or view requirements on our website at www.bracknell-camera-club.co.uk. Without articles from members, this “much enjoyed” newsletter won’t continue and will fold (pun intended) like many other club’s who couldn’t sustain contributions. Besides, the last thing you want to see is all the articles written by our ghost writer - Hortencia Trubshaw ! Thanks !