

Challenge Clive August 08 - Awayday

THE 'Great Debate' that has raged down the ages in the editorial offices of publications as varied as The Times, Sussex Life and Pilot Magazine is the relative importance of words and photographs. Journalists like to think that their copy is pre-eminent while photographers claim that their pictures are what sell a newspaper or magazine. Although not entirely objective, I have always believed that it's the words that really matter and the 'pix' are primarily there to break up the text.



Perhaps resentment is what lies at the heart of my attitude to 'snappers.' Going out on stories accompanied by a photographer, I could hardly fail to notice that while I was fiercely interrogating interviewees in a courageous quest for the truth, he or she would be principally engaged in chewing Rolos. Finally, after I had hurriedly scribbled pages of conscientious notes, the photographer would at last deign to click the camera a couple of times and then suggest we unwind with a cup of tea before returning to the office. How could I unwind when there was a big story to write against a tight deadline? The words, which had to torn from my very soul, were hammered out on a hot typewriter, checked for accuracy, cleared by the sub-editor and finally approved by the editor. Meanwhile the straightforward 'pix' had simply to be developed.

Times and tools have moved on. My faithful Olivetti has followed hot metal presses on to history's junk heap, cameras have gone digital and work practices have changed dramatically. Multi-tasking is all the rage and it's no longer sufficient simply to be a dedicated wordsmith. Unable to hold back the tide of progress, I have instead attempted to embrace the new technology with as much enthusiasm as a man incapable of setting a video recorder to tape Match of the Day can muster.



Because you and the lovely Editor deserve photographs of the very highest quality, I have come along to the Turkey Barn at the Seven Sisters Country Park for a one-day workshop entitled 'Introduction to Landscape and Travel Photography.' The very last to arrive, I join nine classmates who are listening intently as teacher Tish talks us through the itinerary.

Although repeatedly told that size doesn't matter, I can't help but that the others have much bigger cameras with much lenses. Me and my pocket-sized Canon are evidently stops out of our depth of field. Rather like an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, each of us in turn says their name they're here.

If I ever were to take up serious drinking, now might be moment because although Tish and my classmates friendly enough, I suspect the next few hours are going ordeal for someone who can't tell his ISO from his



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aperture.

The first bit of good news – apart from the fact that we can help ourselves to tea, coffee and chocolate digestives – arrives when Tish tells me that my camera has a 'landscape' option, which I have a hunch is on the wheelie thing above the big square bit next to a row of buttons. The bad news is, 'All landscape photographers have tripods.' Everyone in the class has one except, of course, me. Tish kindly lends me a little bean bag, which is the poor man's alternative and might have to double as a stress reliever.

We learn about balance and the 'rule of thirds,' whereby you divide your photo into three both horizontally and vertically thereby creating four 'hot spots' where the lines intersect. Emboldened by my ability to follow this concept, I ask a question that has been troubling me for ages but risks reinforcing my nascent reputation as the class dunce. "When you semi-depress the shutter button, why do those little green squares appear where they do?" Unfazed by this novice inquiry, Tish explains that the auto-focus locks on to the areas of greatest contrast.

Comfortingly, no one giggles and I relax a little as we learn about light, balance and matrices. Did you know that you don't want big spikes at either end of your histograms? Just in case you thought that

histograms can be booked to turn up at parties dressed as Henry the VIII or Joan of Arc, they are those profiles of the Alps that occasionally pop up on the screen at the back of the camera.

We split into pairs and poor Carol, who has come all the way from Weybridge, is saddled with me. Despite only recently graduating from a beginners' class, she dazzles me with her knowledge and is evidently very familiar with her impressive camera. But she can't help me much with mine. However, Andy, Tish's husband, who has been sitting in on the class and making occasional and amusing contributions, can and does. A self-confessed reader of instruction manuals, he treats me to a fascinating glimpse of the sorts of things my modest little camera can do.

We go outside to investigate the effect that different lighting has on our photos. I hit a low point in my photographic career when what I thought was the landscape function seems to be flattening the image and creating the same stretched effect I observed at the cinema when watching Ben Hur. In desperation I turn once again to Andy, who manifests no obvious signs of irritation as he explains that I've slipped the camera into panorama mode. Although I ought to be feeling totally humiliated at the extraordinary depth of my ignorance on matters as fundamental to photography as taking the top off a Biro is to writing, I don't. That's partly because I'm excited at discovering what my camera can do and partly because the evident emphasis is clearly on having a good time.

After lunch we visit a beauty spot which affords glorious views of the Seven Sisters. As the members of our cheery group go in search of that special shot, I chat to Tish and Andy. They live in nearby Seaford and Tish is a full-time, professional photographer who mostly does weddings while Andy works at the Brighton Centre. They've been running these courses for about four months and things are evidently going well. Enough chat, now for that award-winning photo. Conscious of thirds, balance, composition, exposure, lead lines and a host of other considerations, I happily snap away before we return to the Barn. After much fumbling, I eventually manage to extract the memory card from my camera without even having to ask Andy for help. A laptop throws our images up on the screen and the ever-encouraging Tish whizzes through them singling out some for special praise. Mine, which go last because I naturally took longer than everyone else to get the memory card out, are no better and not that much worse than the others. My thistle and fly photo (provisionally entitled 'Thistle and Fly') earns special praise.

The class over and the chocolate digestives all gone, I'm off to complete the altogether tougher and more important part of the assignment – writing it up!

THE VERDICT

Clive was attentive, hard working and contributed enormously to the success of the day. Although he could certainly do with a 'posher' camera, he did extremely well with the equipment he has. Blessed with an exceptionally good eye for composition, he could easily develop into an outstanding photographer.

Tish and Andy

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Need to know

As well as Seven Sisters Country Park, Going Digital holds workshops at Bodiam Castle, Witley Common and Petworth House.

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