Expressions

Conversations in landscape photography



JOURNAL 12

Expressions

Conversations in landscape photography

This journal is published by **aspect2i.co.uk**
Contact: **journal@aspect2i.co.uk**

© Cover Image: by Paul Gallagher

No part of this journal may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from aspect2i Ltd.

The copyright to all photographs and text featured in this journal belongs solely to the authors of the photographs. For permission to use any of the images included in this journal please pass your request to the publisher, who will then forward the request to the authors.

Copyright © aspect2i Ltd 2026. All rights reserved.

JOURNAL 12

Introduction 4

Feature 5
Photographing with intent
by Michael Pilkington

Reflections 14
Considering woodland photography
by Michael Pilkington

Featured photographer 20
Paul Mitchell, FRPS

Broadening horizons 37
Beauty in bleakness
by Paul Gallagher

How I got the shot 45
Patterns of behaviour
by Paul Gallagher

The making of a photograph 51
End game
by Steve Carroll

End note 54

Hang on in there, everyone, as winter is almost complete, and I am sure we will all be glad to bid farewell to the huge volumes of rainfall we have experienced. Even now, the hawthorn is bursting into green, and the blossom trees are in full bloom, not to mention the bluebells carpeting the woodland floors of the UK, yet to flower, but this is certainly the promise of spring. January and February can offer some amazing frosts and snow, and hopefully, the wet portion of the winter we have been experiencing will pass us by, and we will be rewarded with good conditions.

Even with the rains of winter, there is still a plethora of photography that we can enjoy between the showers, but it takes a certain mindset to conjure up the creative spirit. We have to work harder on our thoughts and feelings to enjoy our practice, and this is what we discuss in much of the content of Expressions, issue 12.

Michael Pilkington shares his thoughts on the 'why and what for' in his photography and how embracing intent in your approach not only makes your work more rewarding, but gives it a deeper meaning from initial exposure to finished image.

With the advent of Spring, it is time when many of us turn to the woodlands for our photography. Always a challenging environment, but one that is rewarding. Michael Pilkington gives us some reflections on how to tackle this

Paul Gallagher tells us of his experiences whilst running one of our Photography Retreats on the beaches of the beautiful Isle of Eigg. Even after many years of being out there, he describes the dangers of preconceived ideas and how he overcame the disappointment they created.

Our featured photographer in this issue is Paul Mitchell FRPS. Paul Gallagher and Paul Mitchel have known each other for many years, so it seemed apt to ask Paul some questions about his journey in photography. We are sure you will enjoy the beautiful work he has shared and the stories behind it.

We will all have worked in challenging environments at some time. Along with this, if we set out with a doubt of how we will approach our photography when there, then a little trepidation can set in. Paul Gallagher describes the bitter cold on the open plains of Canada and how the beauty of the place gradually revealed itself.

As always, Expressions is free to everyone, so if you know a budding photographer or a visual artist you would think would enjoy what we are offering here, then please share this link with them **aspect2i.co.uk/downloads/expressions**

Photographing with intent

by Michael Pilkington

Photographing with intent

by Michael Pilkington

If there is one attribute that has the power to transform your photography, it is intent. Intent when making the photograph and intent when editing it.

Many photographers spend years improving their technical skills. They learn about exposure, depth of field, filters, sharpness and post-processing. These skills matter as they give us the tools to work with precision and confidence and realise the final image. But technical competence alone does not necessarily lead to stronger photographs. Photographers improve because they want to make better photographs. Better photographs are those where the photographer's intent is clearly articulated, well-constructed and successfully realised.



© Michael Pilkington

Technical knowledge tells us how to make an image. Intent tells us why we are making it. Without

intent, photography can become a sequence of technical actions carried out without a clear objective. With intent, those same actions become purposeful decisions, each one helping to shape the final image.

The idea that photographers should have a sense of the final photograph before pressing the shutter is not new. The concept of previsualisation has been part of photographic thinking for many decades and is often associated with Ansel Adams.



© Michael Pilkington

Previsualisation is commonly described as the ability to imagine the finished photograph before it is taken. Adams often spoke of seeing the final print in his mind before exposing the negative. In his well-known analogy, the negative was the score and the print the performance. It remains a powerful idea. For many photographers, however, previsualisation is often interpreted as a single moment of imagination. You look at the scene, mentally picture the photograph, and then take it.

In practice, the process is usually more fluid than that. When working in the landscape, I often try to imagine the image I am making as a finished print hanging on the wall. This simple exercise slows me down. It encourages a moment of reflection. Is the image strong enough? Does it have the presence to hold attention over time? Is it a visual translation of how I feel about the landscape?



© Michael Pilkington

But over the years, I have come to prefer a slightly different word: Intent.

Intent feels more considered. It suggests purpose and direction rather than simply anticipation. It asks not only what the final image might look like, but what the photograph is about.

Intent does not necessarily begin when the camera reaches your eye. Often it forms earlier. Sometimes it exists before you even arrive at a location. You might travel to a mountainous landscape hoping to capture a sense of scale and grandeur. You might visit a woodland with the intention of exploring

colour, rhythm and structure. At other times, intent forms when you arrive and begin to experience the landscape. It might be the majesty of mountains rising above the valley floor. It might be intricate patterns in sand revealed by the retreating tide or the quiet resilience of an aged tree holding on against the forces of wind and weather. Sometimes the driver is more subtle. It might simply be the



© Michael Pilkington

atmosphere of the place or the quality of the light. In its simplest form, it may be just the way the place makes you feel.

Whatever the source, something captures your attention. Something holds you there for longer than a passing glance. That moment of communion is often when intent begins.

You may not define it immediately in words, but you recognise that something about the scene matters or is holding your attention. That recognition should start to guide how you photograph it.

Once intent begins to form, it influences every decision you make. Composition becomes clearer. Instead of trying to include everything in the frame, you begin to simplify. The most important element in the scene becomes the centre of the photograph and other elements either support it or are



© Michael Pilkington

removed. Exposure decisions become more purposeful. A darker exposure may reinforce mood and atmosphere. A brighter exposure may emphasise openness or calm. Choice of aperture, focal length and perspective all begin to serve the same objective.

Without intent, it is very easy for photographs to become visually discordant. The frame may contain interesting elements, but with no clear hierarchy. The viewer is unsure where to look or what the photograph is trying to convey.

Intent helps to resolve that uncertainty. It creates harmony within the frame and establishes a clear visual priority. Even when viewers interpret the photograph differently, they can sense that the image

has direction and coherence. Interpretations are free for all, but the essence of the photograph will always be yours.

The importance of intent does not end when the shutter is pressed. In many ways it becomes even more important during editing.



© Michael Pilkington

One of the most common difficulties photographers encounter when editing is simply knowing where to begin. Faced with a raw file, they are unsure what they want the photograph to become. As a result, they begin experimenting with adjustments, moving sliders around to see what effect they have on the image. Exposure is increased and reduced. Shadows are lifted and then darkened again. Highlights might be suppressed or enhanced. The process becomes exploratory but not necessarily purposeful. Even worse, the results of unintended exploration can become the foundations of a final image,

whereby the photographer is not sure if they are pleased with it or not.

The use of presets is another way to explore the image, and they are applied to see what happens. They appear to give a shortcut to realising the final image. The problem is that these presets do not 'know' what the intended outcome of the photograph was as well as the photographer who took it!

Clear intent changes this completely. If you already know what the photograph is about, the editing path becomes far more obvious. Adjustments are made to reinforce the structure and mood that originally drew you to the scene. Editing then becomes a process of clarification rather than experimentation.



© Michael Pilkington

Another challenge photographers often face is knowing when editing is complete. Without intent, this can be difficult to judge and often concludes when the image before you begins to look worse. In short, you have exhausted the adjustments that looked appealing. Small adjustments continue to be made, sometimes improving the photograph and sometimes simply changing it. Intent provides a simple answer. The photograph is finished when it clearly communicates what you set out to show. Intent does not remove the creative process, but it provides a clear path through it.

So how do we cultivate intent?

Developing intent begins with a simple habit. Before pressing the shutter, pause for a moment and ask yourself a question: What am I trying to show here? The answer may be straightforward. It might



© Michael Pilkington

be the drama of a storm over the sea, the delicate pattern of frost on grass, or the quiet persistence of a tree standing alone in the wind.

Allow that intention to guide your composition and your editing decisions later. Over time, this habit becomes instinctive. Photographic decisions become clearer, and the images themselves become more coherent.

The result is not simply better photographs. It is a more thoughtful and rewarding photographic process. Photography is no longer just about recording what is in front of you. It becomes about expressing what made you stop and pay attention in the first place.

Considering woodland photography

by Michael Pilkington

Considering woodland photography

by Michael Pilkington

Spring and early summer are among the most rewarding times to explore the woodland with a camera. After the sparseness of winter, the forest begins to stir again. Fresh leaves start to appear across the canopy, ferns unfurl from the woodland floor, and the light softens as it filters through the first layers of foliage above. For a brief period, the woodland exists somewhere between openness and enclosure.



© Michael Pilkington

I find this moment offers something special. Shapes and textures begin to reappear, and sunlight

through the emerging canopy creates pools of light on the woodland floor. It is an environment that invites slow exploration and patient observation.

Yet woodland has always presented something of a challenge photographically. Unlike coastal or mountain landscapes, it rarely provides simplistic opportunities, the burden of which is left to us. Trunks intersect, branches overlap, and layers of foliage compete for attention within the frame, whilst they all compete for the sparse light. What feels innate, atmospheric and immersive when we stand among the trees can easily become confused and cluttered when translated into a photograph. Woodland is inherently complex.



© Michael Pilkington

There are many ways to respond to this complexity. One way is to emphasise the graphic structure of the woodland, using the repetition and rhythm of trunks and branches to create strong visual patterns. Another is to isolate smaller details within the forest using a long lens: a cluster of leaves, the texture of bark or emerging fern fronds. These approaches, among others, can produce great images.

I have another way of responding to photographing woodlands, which is by allowing myself to be less

concerned with structure. Sometimes, I try to capture the essence or atmosphere of the woodland by using softness and ambiguity within the frame. In this way, edges become less defined, tones blend gently together, and the forest begins to feel quieter, less abrasive and more reflective. Images move away from literal interpretation to something more atmospheric and suggestive. Light becomes more important than detail. Mood begins to take precedence over recording the scene.



© Michael Pilkington

I use several approaches that can encourage this more ethereal interpretation. Working with a shallow depth of field can soften surrounding detail and allow the woodland to dissolve gently into tone and texture whilst singling out a chosen facet within the chaos. Using antique lenses introduces a gentler rendering of branches and foliage, replacing hard definition with a more suggestive quality, celebrating their inherent imperfections. Due to the lack of lens coatings, the resulting images also tend to be warmer and the colours more authentic, adding to a calmer aesthetic.

Using a Lensbaby creates a very different effect, creating edge swirls and ghosting, further contributing to impressionistic photographs.

Infrared photography in woodland can be particularly successful. By recording light beyond the visible spectrum, it transforms the tonal relationships within the forest. Foliage often becomes luminous even without the presence of direct light, while trunks and branches are depicted as the skeletal structure beneath it. When detail softens, and edges become less defined, the woodland begins to settle into a coalescence of tone and light. Images convey the atmosphere of the woodland; they become suggestive. Bringing together infrared with Lensbaby or antique lenses delves deeper into a world of ethereal divergence, leaving the clarity of the real world behind.



© Michael Pilkington

By allowing the photograph to remain slightly unresolved, by accepting softness, ambiguity and suggestion, the woodland can reveal itself in ways that feel both calmer and more evocative. In doing this, the photograph begins to feel as we do when allowed to just sit and stare whilst being surrounded by the trees. The communion of us and the woodland becomes the essence of the image.



© Michael Pilkington

Seen in this way, the woodland becomes an environment that invites interpretation, where atmosphere and suggestion can often reveal more than graphic description. For me, it is a very complementary approach to capturing the wonder of woodlands.

Featured photographer
Paul Mitchell, FRPS

Paul Mitchell, FRPS

For anyone with a social media account who enjoys poring over the work that photographers share, the incredible woodland images by Paul Mitchell must surely have seized your attention. From graphic designer to Chair of the Landscape Assessment Panel of the Royal Photographic Society, Paul has decades of experience, and in more than just one genre. We always aim to share with you photographs of beauty, and this is why we had to approach Paul to be our Featured Photographer in this issue and learn more about his journey.



© Paul Mitchell

You began in art school studying graphic design. What was it that attracted you to graphics and has that influenced you as a photographer?

In fact, my interest in photography started during my teenage years, even before attending art college, due to my parents gifting me a Halina Paulette Electric, my first comprehensive 35mm camera.

Throughout my school years, I discovered I had a natural talent for drawing, encompassing both simple still-life sketches and attempting to emulate comic book artists. When it came to selecting a career path, I made a swift decision to pursue a career in the creative industry. My inaugural year at art college commenced with a foundation course that provided me with a formal introduction to photography, coupled with life drawing, calligraphy, and basic filmmaking. Subsequently, I then embarked on a three-year degree course in Graphic Design.



© Paul Mitchell

At the end of those three years, my passion for photography was such that it led me to set the ambitious goal of becoming a commercial photographer. However, I soon realised that achieving this aspiration would necessitate apprenticing myself to a working photographer or studio, with very little compensation! After relying on my parents' generosity for the preceding four years, I felt I had to prioritise a more financially rewarding position as a graphic designer. Nevertheless, I maintained my interest in photography, albeit in my spare time.

Your career in photography began with film and I know that you have extensively explored pinhole photography. What are the qualities of this genre that most appeal to you, and also, what are the challenges compared to conventional photography?

Around 2008, I stumbled upon an article by Steve Gosling in a photographic magazine. The article explored the use of a pinhole camera, a technique I had previously experimented with while at school but had dismissed as a little bit basic and not particularly practical out in the field.



© Paul Mitchell

Explaining the appeal of this form of photography is a challenge. It relies more on instinct and creative vision than technology. One unique feature is the incredible depth of field, where everything in front of the camera is equally in focus. I've experimented with black and white, colour negative, and positive film, and the variety of images produced is vast. They all share a common aesthetic: a beautifully soft, ethereal look, yet can also be dark and foreboding. The long exposures reveal the passage of time, transforming water into mist and clouds into a glorious blur.



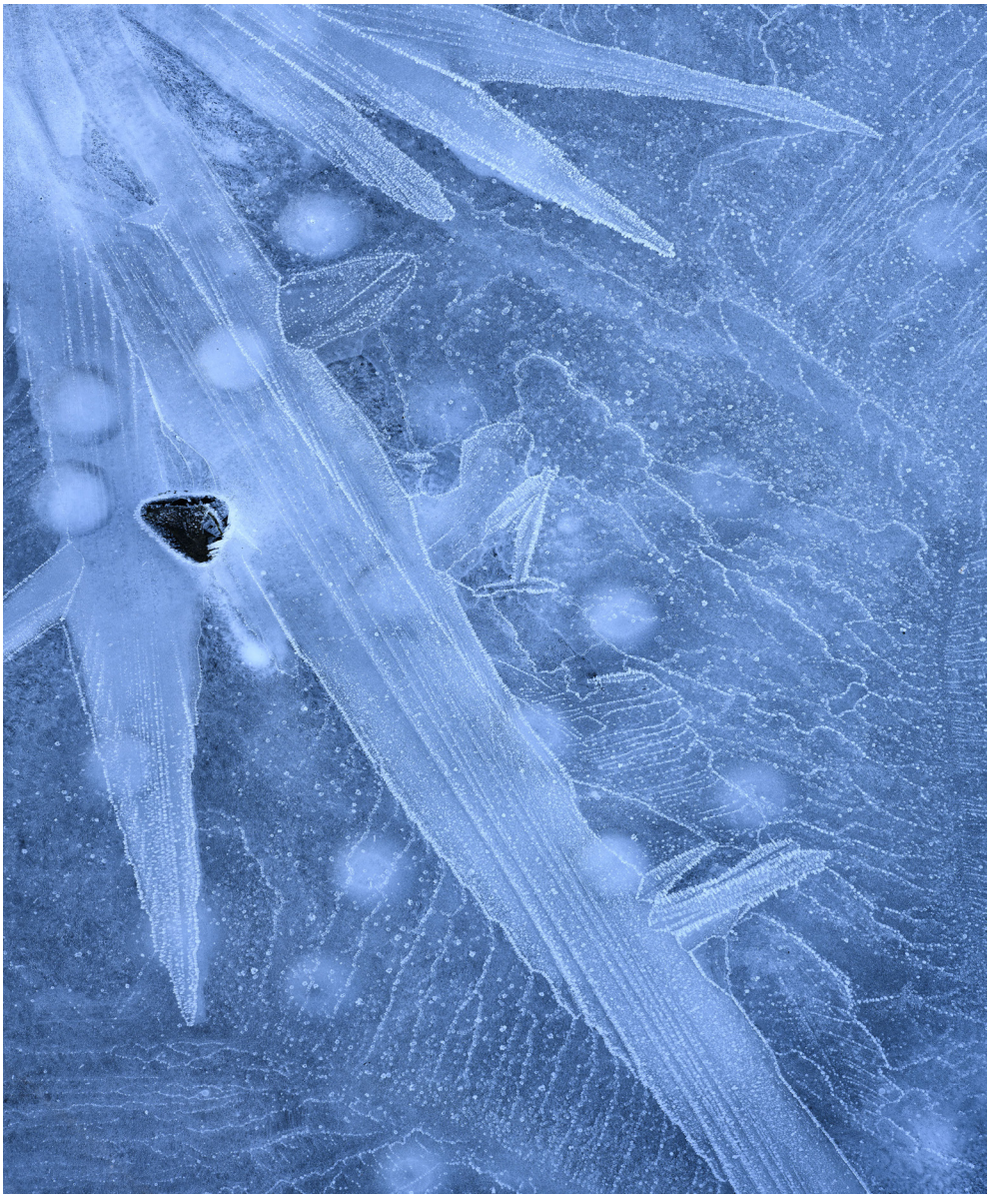
© Paul Mitchell



© Paul Mitchell

You are clearly a man of many photographic talents, having been successful in many different genres from urban photography to botanical photography, to name a few. How would you describe the challenges and also the rewards of exploring different genres?

I often get asked about my manmade and natural texture series and the inspiration behind them. Simply put, I capture what I see! My overriding message is to encourage people to look closer and deeper into both the natural and manufactured world. I often refer to these images as my inner landscapes.



© Paul Mitchell

I personally don't find this type of photography difficult. I often find images in the most unlikely places. The reason most people might find it difficult is that they can easily walk past something without even thinking that there might be an image there. For example, when you're at the coast, look for textures in the rocks, sand patterns, seaweed, and old boats. When you're in the city, look for textures in the pavement, street furniture, parks, and ponds.



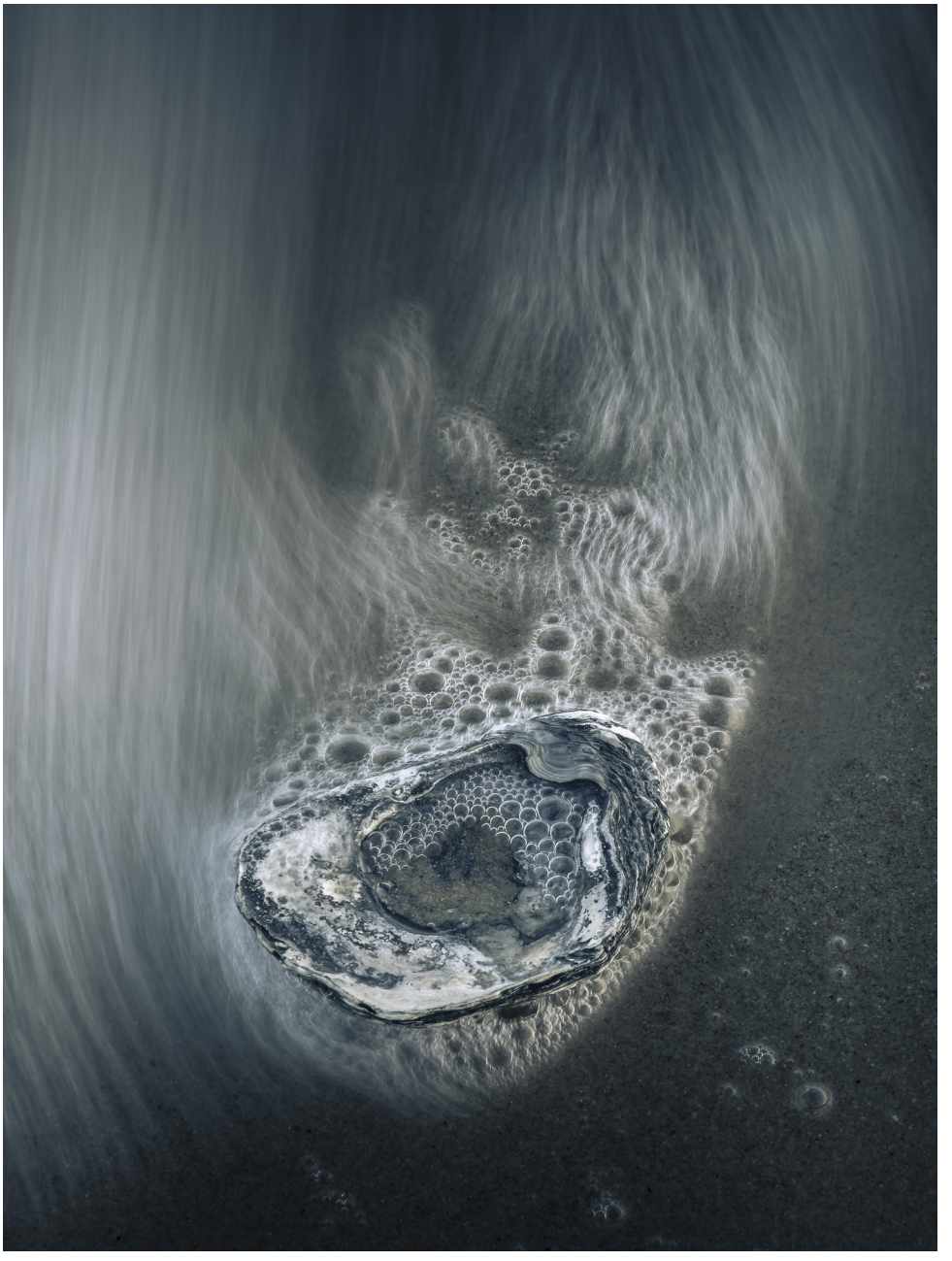
© Paul Mitchell

Once I've found a potential image, I can record it in many different ways. If I come across something that appeals to me and I don't have anything else, an iPhone is ideal. If I'm out and about, specifically looking for detail images, I usually have my small, compact camera with me. It's small, light, and relatively inconspicuous. Even though it has an integrated viewfinder, I always use the live view to compose. I find using a large DSLR too cumbersome, and you're more likely to draw attention to yourself, especially in urban areas!



© Paul Mitchell

I also know that not everything works. The more complicated the image, the less impact it has. So, my motto is to keep it simple! Once again, having an open eye and mind, I can link directly to the same skills I use in graphic design.



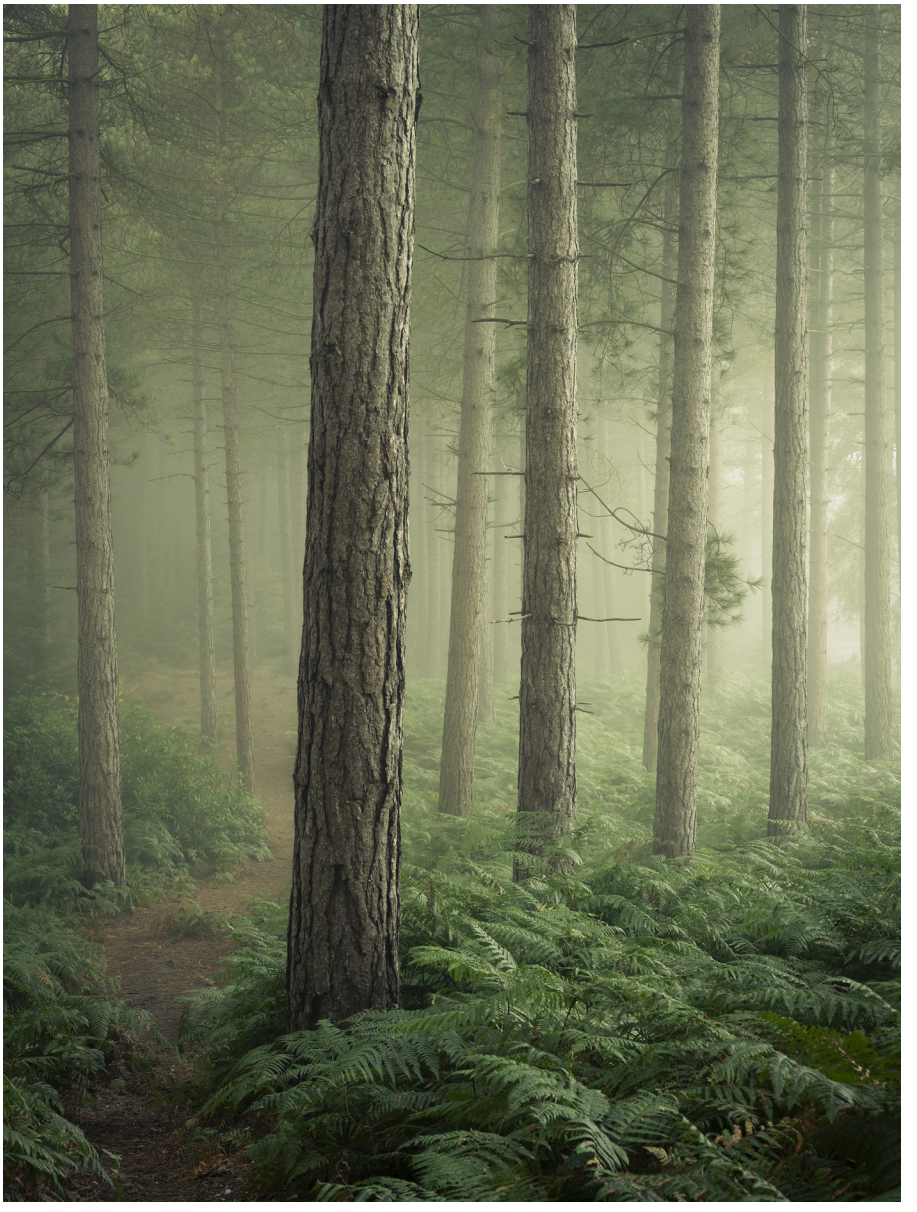
© Paul Mitchell



© Paul Mitchell

Of all the genres of your work I have seen, you are probably most known for your work of woodlands. Would you say this is the environment where you most feel at 'home' and connected to?

I cannot imagine a more meaningful way to celebrate the lives of trees than through the lens of my camera. Some are ancient sentinels, standing for centuries, while others are younger specimens contributing to the rich, layered tapestry of British woodlands. Many grow in quiet, anonymous corners of the countryside, unnoticed by most who pass by, seemingly indifferent to the changing world around them. Yet each tree carries its own history, shaped by seasons, storms, and shifting light.



© Paul Mitchell



© Paul Mitchell

During my woodland walks, I often pause before pressing the shutter, reflecting on the passage of time since these trees first emerged as fragile saplings. I think about the countless sunrises they have witnessed and the silent transformations of the landscape around them. In these cathartic, unhurried moments, I feel a deepening connection with the natural world - one that goes far beyond photography.



© Paul Mitchell

In my twenties and thirties, I spent many peaceful hours coarse fishing along quiet riverbanks. The act of waiting for a fish to bite sharpened my senses and encouraged stillness. More often than not, I would return home empty-handed, yet feeling completely renewed. The true reward was never the catch, but the immersion in nature: the gentle movement of water, birdsong in the distance, and the rhythm of the day unfolding. I experience that same restorative calm in the woodlands, sometimes not even taking my camera out of the bag. Simply being present among the trees is enough.



© Paul Mitchell

Along with becoming an incredibly talented photographer, you have always been an avid advocate of sharing your knowledge with other photographers through lecturing, judging and being a panel member for the Royal Photographic Society. What is it about helping others that inspires and nourishes you?

Throughout my career in photography and the wider creative industries, I have been fortunate to encounter generous individuals who offered guidance, encouragement, and their invaluable time to help me grow. Their mentorship not only shaped my technical skills but also strengthened my confidence and creative vision.



© Paul Mitchell



© Paul Mitchell



© Paul Mitchell

Looking back, I recognise just how pivotal their support was in enabling me to achieve my ambitions. As I have grown older and gained experience, it has felt both natural and important to give something back - to repay that generosity by supporting others on their own journeys.

I joined the Royal Photographic Society in 2003, a decision that marked a significant step in my professional development. In 2007, I was awarded my Associate distinction, followed by my Fellowship in 2014 - milestones that represented years of dedication, reflection, and creative exploration.



© Paul Mitchell

In 2016, I was honoured to be invited to serve as a distinctions panel member, contributing to the Visual Art, Photobooks, and Landscape panels. Until recently, I had the privilege of chairing two of these panels, a responsibility I approached with care, fairness, and deep respect for each applicant's work.

For the past decade, serving as an assessor has been both a privilege and a source of immense pride. I have never undertaken the role for recognition, but rather for the opportunity to guide and encourage like-minded photographers in realising their goals and fulfilling their creative potential.

Beauty in bleakness

by Paul Gallagher

Beauty in bleakness

by Paul Gallagher

My travels have taken me to many parts of the world and nourished me with a wealth of experiences and photographic opportunities. I have always been drawn to the wilderness, and being surrounded by mountains, walking on pristine beaches and exploring the darkness of dense forests has made me feel replete as a photographer. The first suggestion that I should broaden my horizons, almost literally, and visit areas of vast open plains was when I became open to the suggestion of visiting the Great Plains of the USA, namely, Montana and North Dakota.



© Paul Gallagher

We often have preconceptions to grapple with when we consider travelling to a landscape that is all but bereft of the features we are familiar with, and indeed, we enjoy being surrounded by. There is a comfort in discovering the forest you are going to on a map or the geology of the coast symbolised by a key, but when this is replaced by an immense geographic area devoid of even the simplest of contour lines, there is little to anchor your hopes on, and enthusiasm begins to dwindle. Thankfully, when first visiting the landscapes of Montana and North Dakota, I was accompanied by a photographer who had already overcome this unease and could share the photographs to evidence it.

As with any journey far away, the commencement often begins by arriving at an airport commonly situated in an urban conurbation, after which things change swiftly when you head out of town. This was the case when I took the highway from Billings in Montana into the heart of the plains, and more recently when I left Saskatoon in Canada and headed onto the Canadian plains. The trip was designed as an extensive circular route beginning and finishing back at Saskatoon.



© Paul Gallagher

First impressions can have a huge bearing on how you may choose to pictorially represent a landscape with photographs. Given that I arrived in this area of Canada in late January, it was cold. The moment I walked the airbridge from the plane into the terminal, arguably an indoor environment, I could feel the low outside temperatures seeping through the glass; the world outside was frozen, and the ground staff were suitably clad for their working day.

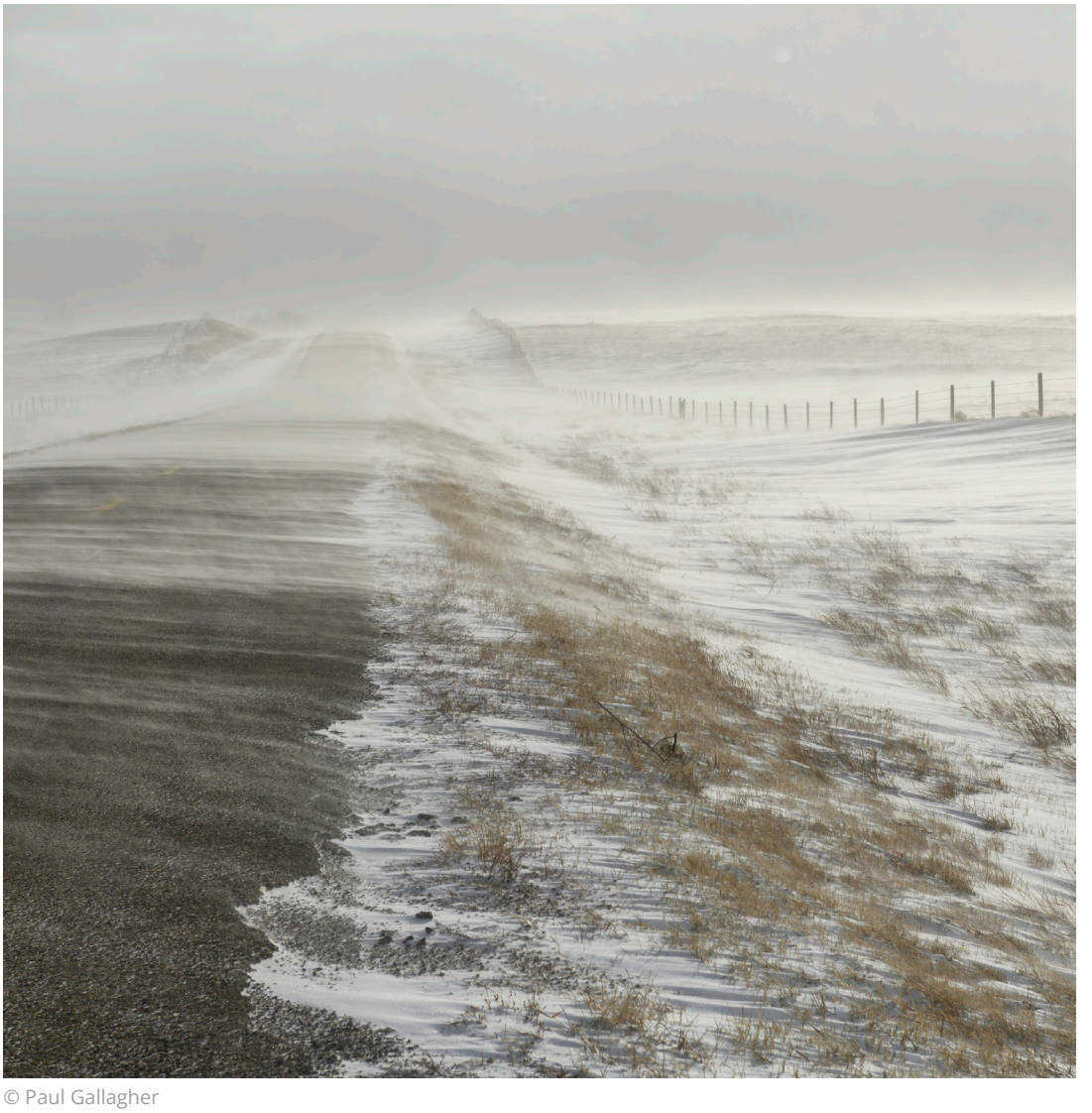
The landscape could be described as similar to Montana and the Dakotas of the USA, but it has its differences, mainly in the sense of scale you witness as you first take to the roads. Vastness is difficult to assimilate as the flat landscape rolls off the edge of the horizon, and you are aware that it stretches much further than that.



© Paul Gallagher

My reason for visiting this region of Canada was the remnants of abandonment that are littered all across this landscape. Ghost towns, farmsteads and houses can be found in isolated pockets telling a similar story of the very same hardships experienced by the first settlers on the great plains of America. Life was an endurance here with incredibly difficult farming conditions thwarted by intensely hot summers and bitterly cold winters. As the Americans did, the Canadians packed all they owned and headed to the cities to survive, often living in poverty.

Being early in the year and amidst an unseasonably cold episode, the winter was in full fury, but the reward of low sun was immeasurable with warm light flooding the plains, illuminating the sparse vegetation of grasses and crop stubble, turning them orange and yellow, lines of which extended for miles across the gentle undulations. Along with the houses and farmsteads, the railroads played a pivotal role in enticing communities to come together here, and the eventual railroad departure caused decimation to the hamlets.



© Paul Gallagher

When arriving in these settlements, there is an eerie sense of bleakness. The unoccupied properties are clear to see, but often interspersed within the abandonment were community survivors, people who still call these places home and are somehow eking out a living. Having never explored these Canadian towns and villages before, there was a sense of slight trepidation that you may not be welcome, or you are diminishing the privacy afforded by the remoteness.

On every occasion we did encounter locals, they were as welcoming and warm as we could have hoped for, and even more beneficial was the history they wanted to enthusiastically share with us. This, too, has been my experience in the USA. Of all the visits I have made, the majority of farmers and truckers we have encountered welcomed us and engaged in conversation. Rather than not wanting us out there, it would seem that human interaction is a rare occurrence and one that is cherished.

There are a few towns with bright lights and shops to visit, and there is an air of vulnerability to being there, but this is arguably the essence of the place. The lack of people and being enveloped in a frozen wilderness does not make the place feel uninviting, but utterly fascinating in its barren beauty. If you leave the paved roads onto the gravel roads, which we did many times to find abandoned properties, this sense of wonder amidst the snow-covered world around us was all the more amplified.



© Paul Gallagher

The experience of travelling in Canada has few similarities. As you exit the warmth of the car, the only sound you will hear will be the wind passing over the plains. During the winter months, if these winds gain velocity, I would be dishonest in not describing them as bitter. Walking across ice-encrusted fields to a rise in the landscape that allows you to see a lone church that was once a place of worship for a community is nothing less than revelatory. To stand there and realise that in this isolation, there was once a settlement of houses, stores and farm buildings, now all decayed and below the ground.

When the blizzards arrived, visibility would be lessened and almost lost, and the occasional ghostly profile of a grain elevator or church spire would gradually emerge from the airborne snow. I found myself fascinated by the buildings we discovered, but equally transfixed by the landscape itself and the roads that passed over it. The absence of features and gentle undulations seemed enough for me in many of my photographs. The grasses that became luminant in the setting sun provided an element of warmth in the plains, though not felt at the fingertips.



© Paul Gallagher

I have used the adjectives barren, bitter, abandoned and bleak because they best fit a description of the Canadian Plains, but don't take this negative connotation as what I felt whilst I was there, nor what influences my memories and the photographs I created. The Canadian Plains hold a raw beauty that has a clarity visually, as it is experienced. On this journey through the plains, I most definitely broadened my horizons, both the ones in front of the camera and the horizons in my creative consciousness.



© Paul Gallagher

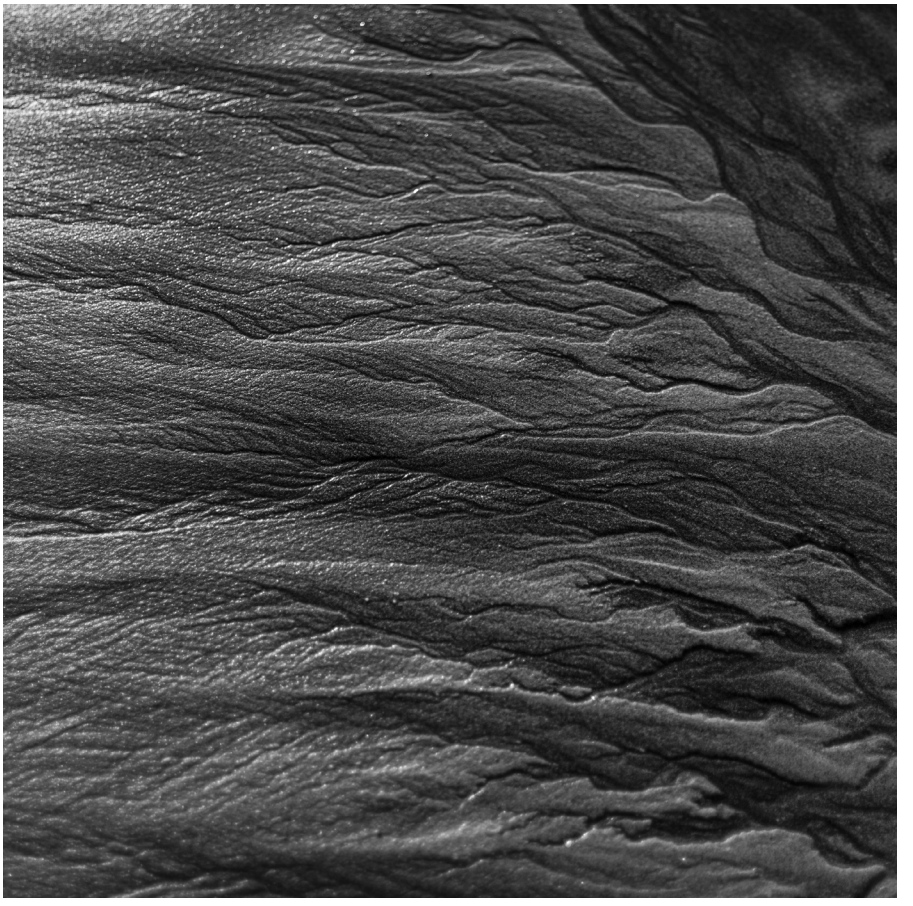
Patterns of behaviour

by Paul Gallagher

Patterns of behviour

by Paul Gallagher

I would have liked to believe, after the many times I have visited beaches and the coast, that I would be able to comfortably adapt to the weather conditions and light available to me. On a recent visit to the Isle of Eigg in the Inner Hebrides, my own expectations became something of a challenge. I began the fifteen-minute walk down the rough track towards a beach known as the Bay of Laig. In the distance, I could see the dramatic profile of the mountains on the Isle of Rum with clouds glancing across their summits. Even at this stage, I had an inner enthusiasm for the weather conditions before me, and I began previsualising the symbiosis of vast sand patterns leading away to the mountains across the bay.

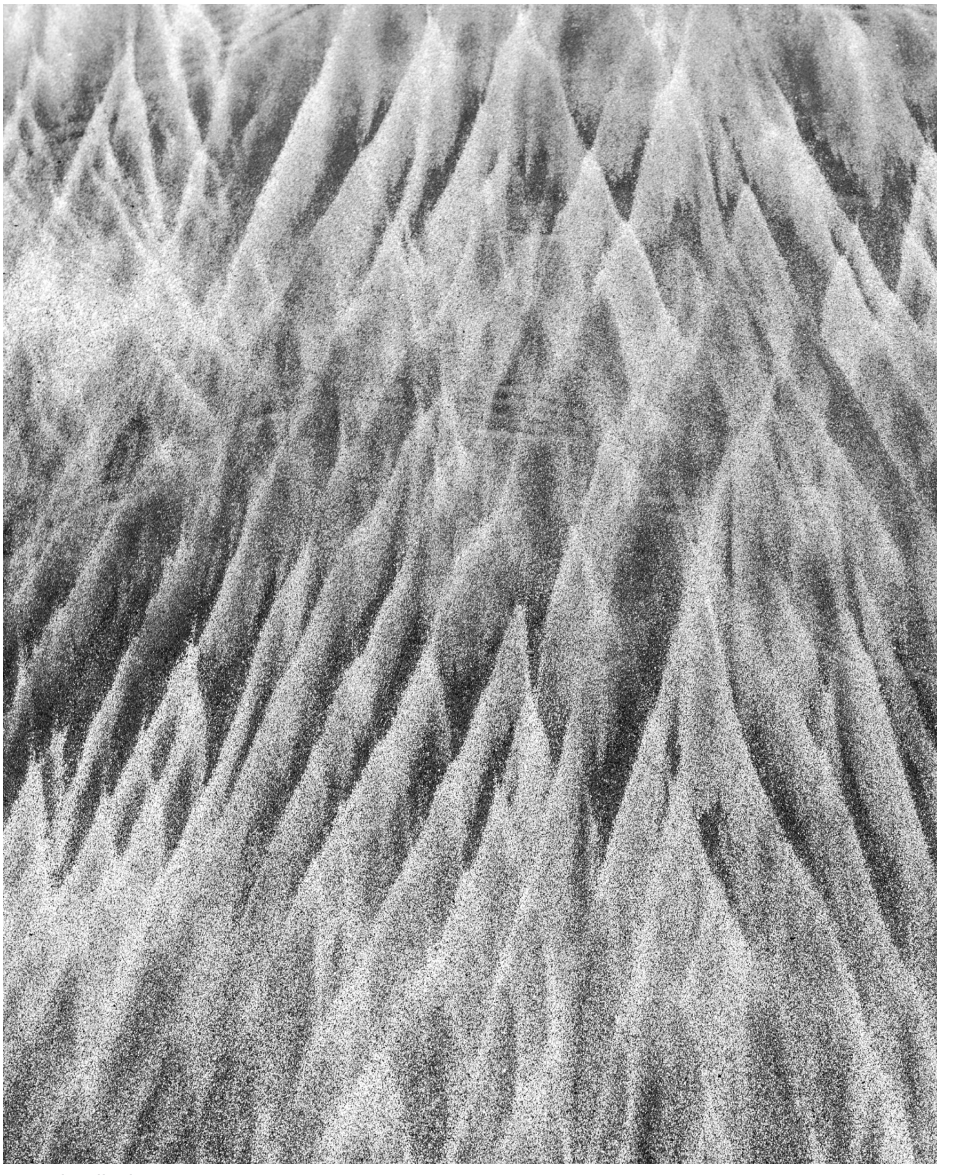


© Paul Gallagher

There is, and always has been, a danger in assuming any conditions in a wild open landscape, certainly in the Highlands of Scotland, will work with you, or even worse, remain static. Almost as soon as I arrived on the open sands, as the tide gradually retreated, so did the cloud and the soft light I had

witnessed on my approach created by passing clouds was disappointingly replaced by blue skies and harsh early afternoon sunlight.

This is where my years of maturation and experience should have prevailed, but they momentarily didn't, and I felt my thoughts transition into feeling I'd lost an opportunity, or something had gone really quite wrong! I was standing on a pristine beach surrounded by what most would deem as a staggering landscape, and began to experience two emotions: disappointment and confusion. Thankfully, I had the presence of mind to remind myself that this is a common occurrence in landscape photography when we allow ourselves to delve into expectation and assumption.



© Paul Gallagher

The light and weather conditions I thought I had to work with were gone, and the images I hoped I could create had changed. This is a risky business indeed. I have known photographers to head out ready for first light, having been informed by several reliable weather forecasts that thick cloud will prevail, then at breakfast, complain that they did not get the sunrise they had hoped for. I can't help thinking in circumstances like this, they knew they had it coming!



© Paul Gallagher

We must all be aware; this transition is enough to spoil your day. We often look at photographs taken of landscapes we plan to visit, and understandably, the samples shared on social media are ones taken in impeccable conditions with light to be envious of, whilst the failures are left languishing in Lightroom catalogues. What are ideal conditions? There is no answer to this question, and I pose it in an entirely rhetorical way. Ideal is a figment of our imagination, a means of what our mind, our imaginations may see that often don't manifest themselves in the real world.

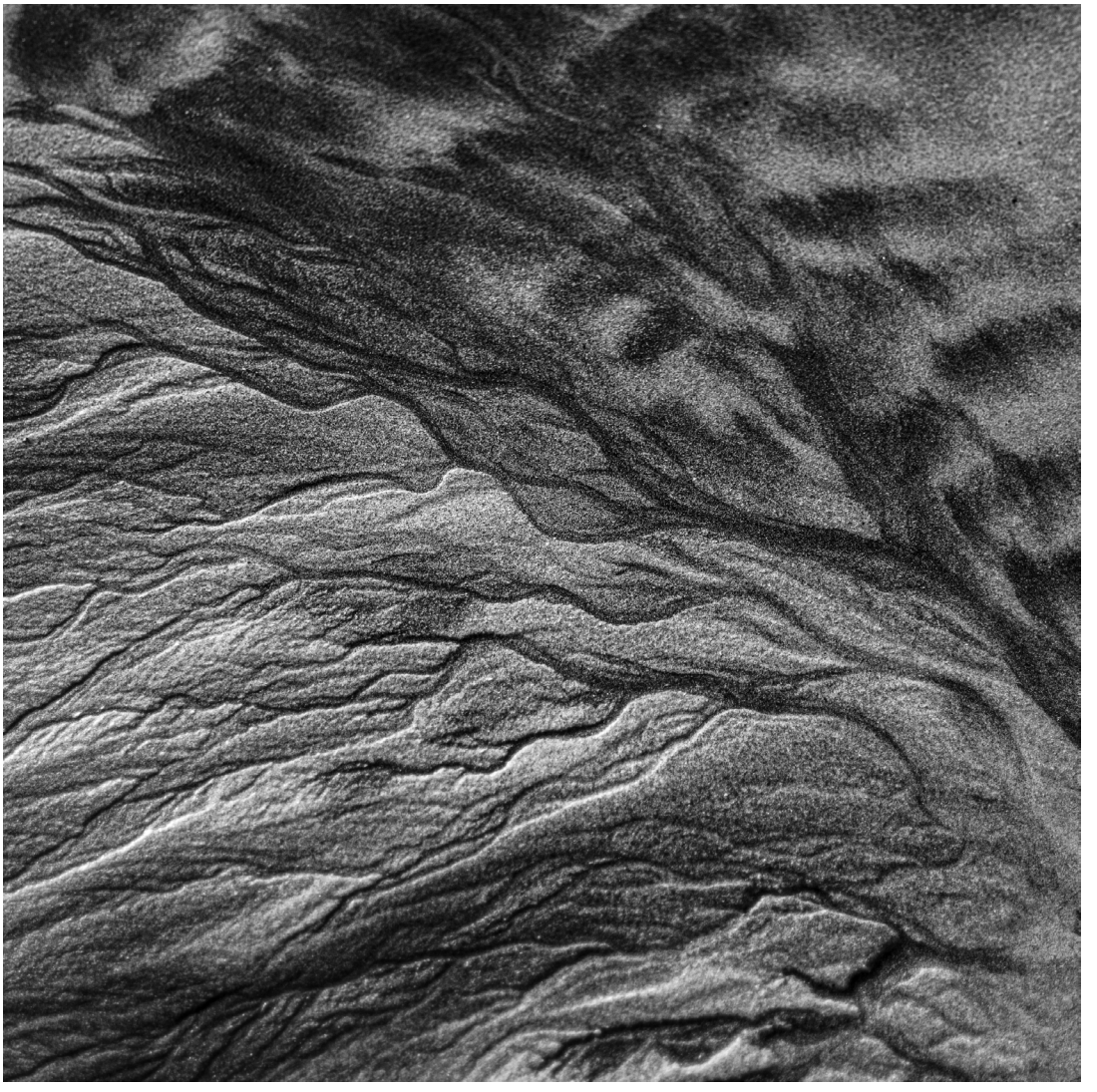
I had to remind myself to be grateful for just being there and not wallow in what was not present. Rather than trying to work against what I was initially troubled by, I allowed myself the time to see beyond what my imagination was creating. I decided to stop for a while and sat on a boulder and just stared at my surroundings. In moments like this, we can clear the mind, empty the cache and let your eyes see what is in front of us again. Very soon, I found fascination in the way the retreating tide had passed over the surface of the sand and created flow patterns and tessellations, many of which were not graphically revealed whilst looking away from the sun.



© Paul Gallagher

As I was in an area where the tide had recently been, much of the sand was still wet and the surface was reflective with bright highlights and deep shadows. Within minutes, I was enveloped in a myriad of compositions at my feet with the intent of photographing the remnant surface features of water flowing. The images I visualised embraced the strong directional sunlight and would be created in black and white, as colour was an ingredient unimportant to the narrative of the images. Just the light. For the remainder of that afternoon, the hours slipped by and long forgotten was the original notion of what I believed I should be photographing on the Bay of Laig.

As photographers, we can make photographs when there is light. This may sound simple, but it presents a very real proclamation that we should draw upon when we hear ourselves saying, "There is no light", or "The conditions aren't right". What isn't 'right' is the way in which we perceive it should have been, often with no control at all in the matter.



© Paul Gallagher

Our mind plays a vital role in how we photograph and how we edit our images. Previsualisation should remain a companion and component of what we create in reality and should not merge with imagination and it should remain the tool we deploy before the camera is reached for.

End game

by Steve Carroll

End game

by Steve Carroll

Having travelled to India on fifteen occasions for photography, I have no hesitation in saying that it is a photographer's paradise.



© Steve Carroll

The country has a rich heritage, and there is no shortage of historically important and visually magnificent forts, palaces, temples, and monuments to turn your camera to. However, it is the country's people who have been the subjects of the vast majority of my work in India. India is geographically huge, and the ethnicity of the people and their appearance vary by region. However, one thing which is consistent whichever region you visit, and in urban or rural areas, is the lack of concern people have when being photographed by strangers. Some will engage and cooperate with a photographer, while many will just continue with their day, apparently oblivious. It really is the perfect place to start photographing people if that is something you have not done before.

City streets bustle. Street markets are vibrant and full of life, and so different to their western equivalents. A photographer can scarcely fail to feel energised.

Rural communities also present endless opportunities. It was in a remote hill village, Longwa, in the far north-eastern state of Nagaland where I captured the image of the two boys playing football.

Nagaland is sparsely populated and home to only about two million of India's total population of nearly one and a half billion. It borders Myanmar, and Longwa itself sits partly in Myanmar. The King's house has the border running right through it. Nagaland is a mountainous state, and Longwa is a half-day drive on unmade roads from the nearest town. In a predominantly Hindu and Muslim country, Nagaland is something of a curiosity, with 88 per cent of people there being Christian, mainly Baptist. The Baptist church really has a profound influence on life in Longwa and Nagaland.

These two boys were the only ones involved in the game. They were playing one versus one with a small wooden goal at each end of a pitch about fifty yards long. Their game was really intense. When I started photographing them, they paid no attention to me at all. One boy gained possession and made straight for the goal, with the other lad snapping at his ankles and if he lost possession, play headed in the opposite direction. They were playing with a homemade ball fashioned from plastic bags tightly rolled and tied up with string. Their pitch was overlooked by the large Baptist church, which dominates the village.

After shooting for the game for some minutes, I started to think about exactly what I wanted to depict. I wanted to show the intensity of the competition between the two boys, the simple circumstances in which the boys lived, and the presence of the Baptist church in Longwa life.

A fast shutter speed, appropriate aperture for the necessary depth of focus, burst mode (really – it is not cheating), inclusion of the rustic goal frame and homemade ball, the two lads fighting for possession and framing the church spire and cross between them has done the job – I think!

End note

"You cannot teach a man anything. You can only help him discover it within himself"
Galileo Galilei

Of course, I will begin by making an addition to this quote, which was recorded in the 17th Century, by the inclusion of women! I slightly disagree with the premise that someone cannot be taught anything. This is, of course, far too simplistic, as we are all aware that people are taught every day, this being the lifeblood of schools and universities throughout the world.

The second half, making reference to the notion that people can discover from within, is an altogether different proposition, and we must explore what this is. We can read facts or be told them, remember and recall this information, but this does not necessarily mean we gain a full understanding of the subject or how it may be applied.

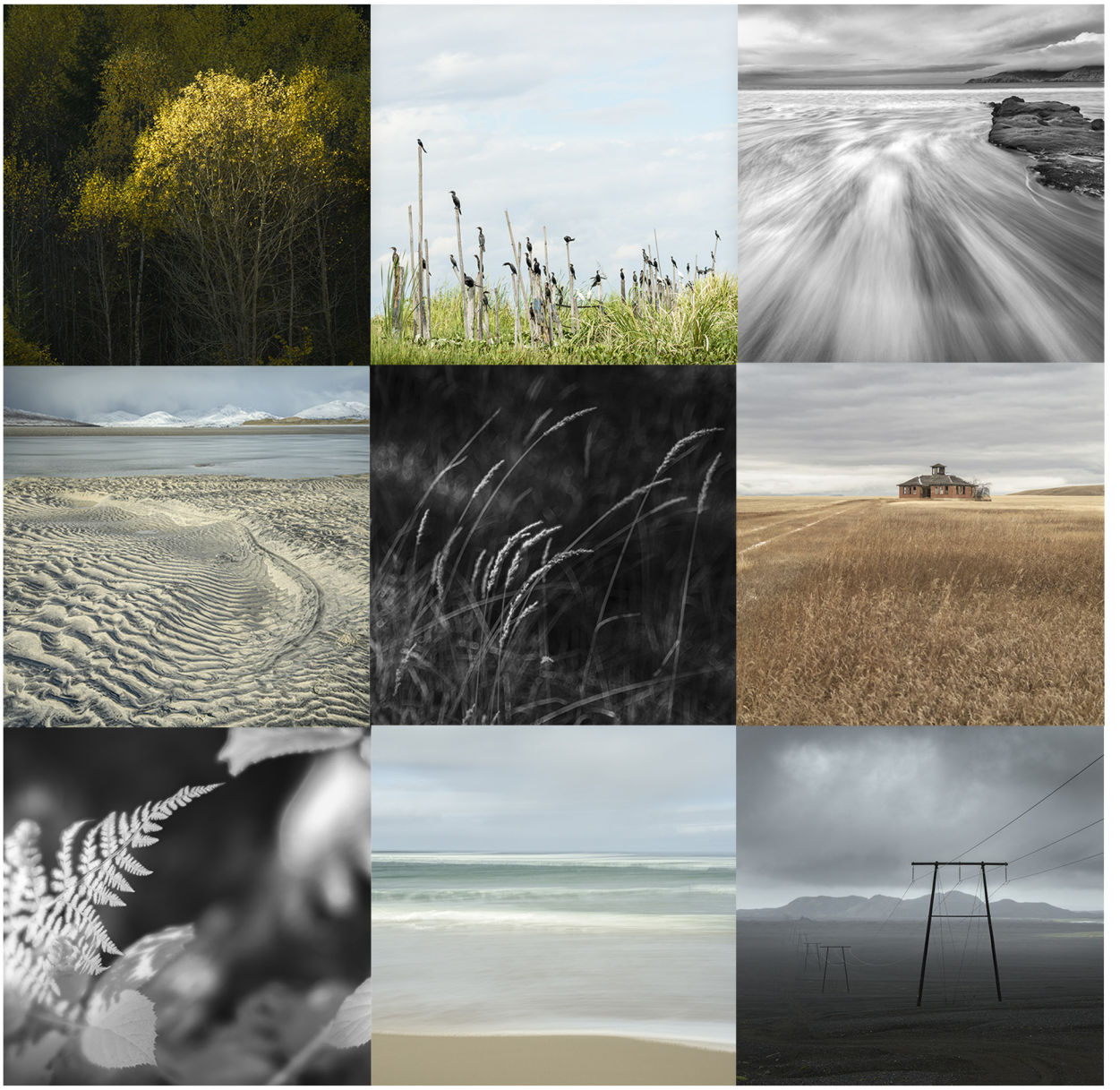
In photography, our early days are occupied by gaining a grasp of the exposure triangle and the relationship between ISO, aperture and shutter speed. When first editing images, with the help of labelled sliders, we establish a knowledge of how the shadows, highlight and clarity sliders will alter the appearance of the image before us, but harnessing this knowledge alone will not foster beautiful finished photographs.

The keyword is 'within', and this is quite different from remembering a fact; it's the application of knowledge in a considered way to create the desired outcome. It is this that is the hardest part to teach. The reason is that it requires intuition and connection with the subject. No manner of sliders can help you here. As teachers of photography, this requires conversations and the confidence for both the photographer and mentor to express themselves. Little progress will be made by simply providing descriptions of camera settings or talking about the compositional components. Progress here is anchored on the intentions of the photographer and their individual creativity.

In today's world of landscape photography, creativity often instigates conversations of ICM and multiple exposures, almost placing pictorial images as achievable through honed technique. Don't be misguided by this notion. We have all looked at an image at some time and said, "That is incredible!" It wasn't the technique that evoked that reaction; it was something from within the photographer. This is the true language of photography that we all should pursue.

If you would like to comment on what you have read, you have something to add, or you have any questions that may help you on your way in your photography, then please get in touch. You may want to contribute as a featured photographer or submit an article. Just drop us a line with your thoughts.

aspect 2i master your photography



Developing photographers, not just images

Our retreats and online courses teach a simple, effective approach to image making, combining time in the field with thoughtful curation and editing, focusing on why decisions matter, not just how.

visit www.aspect2i.co.uk



www.aspect2ico.uk