

Landscapes

LEARN
FROM THE
EXPERTS

The Amateur Photographer Masterclass with Tom Mackie

Landscape photographer **Tom Mackie** and four AP readers explore the best techniques for capturing the sweeping landscapes of North Yorkshire. **Oliver Atwell** joins them

MOST towns and villages have a legend or two, and Hole of Horcum in North Yorkshire is no different. According to folklore, a giant called Wade scooped up a huge clod of earth resulting in a hollow that is 400ft (120m) deep and wide. The reasons for Wade's actions seem to differ depending on who you ask, but however the hollow was formed it has created a landscape photographer's dream. In the right conditions, the area offers spellbinding banks of mist blanketing the area and the morning sun throws shafts of light onto the land. In winter, snow transforms the area into a stunning white vista offering the kinds of moments every photographer prays for.

Gathered in the cold and blustery early morning air, Tom Mackie and four AP readers survey the land and discuss their tactics for the day.

'This is a prime location for showing off the gentle undulations of the heather-covered landscape,' says Tom. 'You'll find all sorts of beautiful details here, such as bracken and rosebay willowherb, that we can use in our foregrounds to great effect. Beyond that, you have nice strong lines and S-shapes that can guide the viewer's eye through the location. There are also a few barns and farmhouses that we can potentially use as subjects.'

'We're going to be covering various

techniques to create exciting landscapes using composition, filters and depth of field,' he says. 'The light is a little flat today, but that's fine because in a location like this, evocative and dramatic images are a given.'

Tried-and-tested tools, such as polarising filters and neutral density (ND) graduated filters, can help to bring out the best in a location. 'Using polarising filters, we can increase colour saturation and, weather permitting, darken the blue skies to give us deep rich tones,' Tom explains. 'We'll also be exploring ND grad filters, which we can use to control and balance the exposure of our images. As we're going to be faced with bright skies on top of landscapes where we want to retain the detail, this is going to be a particularly useful tool.'

As well as Hole of Horcum, Tom and the AP readers also plan to explore Falling Foss in May Beck – a stunning natural waterfall that is one of North Yorkshire's best-kept secrets.

Your AP Master... Tom Mackie



A former contributor to AP's *Photo insight* series, Tom Mackie is one of the world's leading photographers. He has spent many years as an architectural, industrial and landscape photographer, and has a penchant for panoramic photography. Tom has published several books and written numerous articles for photography magazines. He also lectures on photography and regularly holds workshops in the UK and abroad. www.tommackie.com

The AP readers... Andrea Hargreaves



Andrea likes to capture wildlife, urban portraits, abstracts, action and travel photographs. She uses a Canon EOS 60D with a Canon 18-200mm zoom. 'The day was relaxed and informative,' she says. 'We learned how to use graduated filters and their benefits in landscape photography.'

Phil Hargreaves



Phil's favoured subjects are aircraft, landscapes, travel and wildlife photography. He shoots using a Nikon D7000 with Tamron 17-50mm and Sigma 70-300mm zoom lenses. 'We learned to assess the view from different sites and different angles,' he says. 'We also looked at how to compose the image.'

Adrian Ward



Adrian likes shooting events, festivals, macro flower photography and landscapes. He uses a Nikon D60 with a Sigma 18-250mm lens. 'This has inspired me to do more landscape photography,' he says. 'I'd forgotten how colourful the North Yorkshire Moors are.'

David Walker



David enjoys experimenting with different subjects, but landscapes remain his firm favourite. He uses a Canon EOS 500D with a 15-85mm lens. 'It was a great experience,' he says. 'Tom got me thinking about focusing and composition in ways that I had never considered before.'

Background & foreground

WHEN exploring the landscape, there are two elements that vie for the photographer's eye. These are the wide expanses of land that stretch from the midground to the horizon, and the immediate rich detail of the foreground that lies just beneath the eye of the lens. According to Tom, though, these two features need not stand alone – both can easily be incorporated into one image.

'If you're able to include the immediate foreground as well as the landscape, it's worth looking at how those elements can work together,' he says. 'Not only does it add depth to your image, but it also puts the details of

the foreground in context and presents them within the bigger picture.'

The kinds of shots that Tom is referring to are particularly dramatic when you are on an elevated plain, such as a hill or mountain (as you can see below), although the same kind of shot can be achieved at ground level by using a wideangle lens and angling your camera down to take in more of the immediate foreground.

'There's the potential to create abstract images using the detail in the environment and you can also choose to just shoot a straightforward landscape,' continues Tom. 'But combining the two lends another dimension to your shots that can turn a good landscape shot into a great one.'



PHIL HARGREAVES

ADRIAN WARD



Lenses

WHEN shooting the landscape, it is a good idea to have a telephoto lens as well as the obvious choice of a wideangle. Both lenses can bring out unique characteristics of the land and reveal the myriad components that make up a successful landscape image.

'Using a wideangle lens serves the purpose of giving you a dramatic and sweeping view of the landscape,' says Tom. 'You're able to include a lot of foreground as well as the midground, horizon and sky. However, you shouldn't stick with this lens because the telephoto has much to offer in the landscape. A telephoto lens can take little pockets of scenery out of the overall landscape and produce various compositions. If you use a telephoto you can get in close and explore all the little intricate lines and details of the landscape that can draw your viewer's eye into a subject of your choice, such as a barn or an arrangement of trees.'

Using a telephoto lens, which can cause distortion, also means that you can experiment with pan stitches. This is a technique that is particularly effective when faced with wide-open spaces.

DAVID WALKER



'Pan stitches, or panoramas, give the viewer a real sense of just how huge the location is,' says Tom. 'They can be incredibly effective. You shoot a sequence of images and then piece them all together in post-production to form one huge photograph. Make sure you have a sturdy tripod on a flat surface and that your camera is set to manual settings, which you should be using anyway. Also make sure that the autofocus function is turned off. Then gradually pan your camera in increments from one end of the landscape to the next, taking a photo with each pan. Once you have your images, import them into Photoshop and use the Photomerge function (File>Automate>Photomerge).'

ANDREA HARGREAVES



HYPERFOCAL DISTANCE

HYPERFOCAL distance is the nearest distance at which a lens can be focused while keeping objects in the background (infinity) acceptably sharp.

'To put it simply, hyperfocal distance is making the most of your depth of field,' says Tom. 'Let's say that you're shooting at f/14. In the distance there's a barn you'd like to get in focus. If you focus on the barn, all of that usable depth of field is going on the barn and it's not bringing anything to the

foreground, which will be out of focus. However, if we take the image above as our example, you'll see that the best place to focus is one-third into the frame, which is the edge of the heather ridge [that's one-third into the image you see through the viewfinder or in live view, not the environment as you see it outside the camera]. If you focus at that point, you are maximising your depth of field. That means that everything is acceptably sharp.'

TOM HADGRIE



Tilt-and-shift lenses

LOCATIONS such as Hole of Horcum offer copious amounts of detail, as well as sweeping fields. A good tool to use when attempting to capture both elements is a tilt-and-shift lens (for more on tilt-and-shift lenses, see *AP explains...* on pages 64-65 of this issue).

'Locations such as this are an ideal spot to try out a tilt-and-shift lens,' says Tom. 'We mostly associate this lens with art-based images that have large portions of blur surrounding selective pin-sharp areas that create faux miniature scenes. Here we're going to putting the lens to practical use.'

In landscape photography, getting everything in focus is usually the objective, but it is one that can often prove difficult when dealing with points of focus that are both near and far away. Using the tilt function on a tilt-and-shift lens means that once the background is in focus, the foreground can also be brought into focus without having to resort to a large f-number.

'With the windy conditions that we're facing in these early hours, it's going to be a problem using a standard wideangle lens,' says Tom. 'Obviously, we want a large depth of field in order to get everything in focus, but consequently that means we have to resort to a long shutter speed. This means that the foliage in our foreground is going to move. If you have a tilt-and-shift lens this problem can be easily overcome.'

'When using a tilt-and-shift lens you can leave your aperture fairly wide open because you're focusing on one part of the composition, such as the midground,' Tom continues. 'Once you have that one plane in focus, you can adjust the tilt button on your lens and bring your foreground into focus. That means you can get everything you want in focus and shoot using 1/60sec or 1/80sec. By using the tilt function you can control the focus points.'

'When using a tilt-and-shift lens you can leave your aperture wide open because you're focusing on one part of the composition, such as the midground'

USING A FILTER

FILTERS allow photographers to retain more control over the final result of their images. Some produce subtle effects, whereas others are more dramatic. In some cases, they actually help to create images that would otherwise not be possible without them.

'With some landscape images you're going to find that there is a drastic contrast between the necessary exposures for your sky and foreground,' says Tom. 'When you're faced with this situation, you need to apply a filter – in this case, a graduated neutral density filter, otherwise known as a split neutral density filter. With a graduated filter, half the filter is neutral density. This means that half the filter is grey and either reduces or modifies the intensity of wavelengths of light or colours.'

Graduated neutral density filters are used to bring an excessively bright part of a scene into balance with the rest of the image. It can be used to darken a bright sky so that both the sky and subject can be properly exposed. The easiest way to remember this is: the greater the contrast, the darker the grad.

'ND filters can basically be split into two categories: hard and soft,' explains Tom. 'Hard and soft refer to the transition between the grey half and the clear half of the filter. With a hard edge, the transition is abrupt and is used when there is a distinct change in brightness levels, such as in a picture of a field with a horizon line that splits the landscape from a bright sky. A soft-edged filter is used when there is no clear distinction between the light and dark portions of your image.'

Filters are available in a range of intensities (how many stops down you want to bring your highlights), ranging from 0.3 ND/1 stop to 0.9/ 3 stops. Some manufacturers produce more advanced filters (including the famed 10-stop filter), but most photographers use 1-3 stops.

'Sometimes you may find yourself in a position where the intensity of the filters you have aren't quite up to the job,' says Tom. 'It may turn out that you need a 4-stop filter. The easiest solution is to use two filters together such as a 0.3 and a 0.9 filter. Of course, there's always the option to work on the image

in Lightroom [as we'll see later], but it's always better to get it right in-camera.'

A polarising filter has two distinct uses: it can darken skies by filtering out the polarised component of skylight, and it can remove reflections from surfaces such as water.

'I often use a polarising filter when shooting foliage,' says Tom. 'Using the filter can actually reduce reflections, which is something we wouldn't commonly associate with vegetation. If you hold up a polariser and look through it at some leaves, you'll see that the colours look incredibly fresh and saturated, particularly in the greens. However, you should always remember to add 1½-2 stops of exposure because you're losing some light with the filter on your lens.'

'People new to polarisers shouldn't allow the differences between circular polarisers and linear polarisers to confuse them,' adds Tom. 'Visually, there is no difference between the two. It's just that they polarise the light passing through in different ways. Circular types are best for any camera with AF.'

ADRIAN WARD



Post-production

THERE are a number of software packages that can bring out the hidden qualities of your landscape images. Despite your best efforts out on the field, even images taken in ideal conditions can sometimes appear strangely flat and unsaturated. Tom's favoured software is Adobe Photoshop Lightroom, a program designed to assist Adobe Photoshop in managing large numbers of digital files and handle post-processing duties on images that need adjusting.

'There are some features in Lightroom that are, in my opinion, a little more user-friendly than in Photoshop,' he says. 'But equally there are some features in Photoshop that I find easier to work with, such as the Clone and Healing tools. It's all about personal preference.'

Tom takes the users through a handful of key features of Lightroom. 'You'll be working on the raw files that you've shot on location, but it's important to remember that the processing you're doing in the software doesn't affect the actual raw file,' says Tom. 'You don't ever affect the original file. So if you end up making some major changes that you dislike, there's no need to panic.'

'Generally, there is a set process of things I look at,' continues Tom. 'I often start by

ANDREA HARGREAVES

Without filter



With ND grad





Would you like to take part?

EVERY month we invite three to five AP readers to join one of our experts on an assignment over the course of a day. The experts are Tom Mackie (landscapes), Paul Hobson (wildlife) and Cathal McNaughton (street photography). Paul's next workshop is in October, while Tom's next workshop will take place in November.

If you would like to take part, visit www.amateurphotographer.co.uk/masterclass for details of how to apply. Please remember to state which *Masterclass* you would like to attend and make sure you include your name, address, email address, daytime telephone number and two or three examples of your work in your application. Each participant will be able to use his or her own camera, lenses and other equipment such as filters, flashguns and tripods.

'The Crop tool is particularly important, as it can help fix crooked horizons'

checking the exposure and taking that up or down depending on requirements. You have the option of moving the exposure slider up and down, which will adjust the overall exposure of your image so the whole picture either goes lighter or darker. But you also have the option of adjusting the blacks, fill light (midtones) and, with the Recovery tool, you can recover details in your highlights that were lost during the exposure.'

Next, Tom looks at the saturation and vibrancy of his image. 'People often confuse the saturation and vibrancy settings,' says Tom. 'Vibrancy acts on unsaturated pixels, whereas saturation works on the whole image. Going too far on either setting can give your image a very unrealistic feel. I generally limit myself to 30 or 40% on both settings.'

The Crop tool, under the Develop menu and the third icon along underneath your image preview screen, is particularly important, as it can help fix crooked horizons – a flaw that can spoil an otherwise good image.

'In Photoshop, the Free Transform and Rotate tools can leave you with a lot of blank canvas, meaning that you have to crop out portions of your image,' says

Tom. 'This doesn't happen in Lightroom. If you move the slider on the Angle control, it will straighten your image. There won't be any annoying black canvas to crop out.'

Lastly, Tom takes the AP readers through Lightroom's in-built Gradient tool. Using this tool can help the photographer achieve similar effects to those gained using a ND graduated filter on their camera lens.

'The Graduated Filter tool is something that you can spend an age playing with,' says Tom. 'It can help you to darken skies, and give your image a dramatic and moody veneer. But it can also help to bring out details by brightening certain areas of your image.'

To apply a gradient filter, select the Graduated Filter tool (Figure 1) in the Adjustment Brushes panel. 'Click on the edge of the image closest to the region you want to make the adjustment,' explains Tom (see Figure 2). 'In the case of our images, it's likely to be the top of the image where the sky is. Then, drag the gradient marker towards the centre of the image, stopping where you want the adjustment to fade out. You can use the buttons and sliders in the Mask panel (just below the brush selector) to adjust the selected portion. It's as simple as that.'

