

Shoot for the Moon

Monthly news and tips from
Landscape Photographer
Gill Moon



December 2020 Vol 12 - Winter Landscapes

Hello

and welcome to the December edition of 'Shoot for the Moon'

The image above was taken at Ramsholt on the River Deben and was one of the first images that I ever sold. I was lucky in that I used to live right behind the pub at Ramsholt and so this view was on my doorstep and was somewhere I walked every morning. It is the soft subtle winter colour pallet that I still love about this image and it forms part of the inspiration behind this months newsletter which is all about shooting winter landscapes.

Remember to aim high, be inspired and shoot for the moon!

Thank you and happy photographing

Gill

If you would like to get in touch please email me at gill@gillmoon.com

Photographing Winter Landscapes



This image was taken at Bawdsey Quay,
Nikon D850, Nikon 24-70mm lens. F16 at 1/5 second, ISO 100, 0.6 ND grad filter.

Winter landscape photography conjures up snow and frost, bright sunny days and a landscape filled with beauty. In reality nature throws all sorts of conditions at us during the winter and crisp, cold, snowy scenes are becoming less and less common in the south. The key with winter photography is to work with the conditions that you have and try to adapt your shooting style to embrace all the varied weather we get in the UK.

There are some clear advantages to photography in the winter. The days are shorter so sunrise is later, avoiding the need for really early starts. So even if you are not an early riser there really is no excuse for not getting up to watch the sunrise in the winter.

The sun is also much lower in the sky for most of the day avoiding the harsh shadows of summer and giving much nicer light at all times of the day. This means that in the winter

you are not restricted to shooting at sunrise and sunset for the best light.

Winter conditions can produce some of the most magical light of the year so it is a good idea to have a list of locations lined up suitable for whatever the weather throws at you.

Working with the weather

Freezing temperatures add a new dimension to the dormant landscape and help give a magical quality to otherwise stark and dreary scenes. Shooting successful images in these conditions can throw up many technical challenges for the photographer as well as the more obvious physical ones of simply keeping warm.

Before going out on any winter shoot remember to dress appropriately for the weather conditions. Boots, a warm waterproof jacket and some thin gloves which don't

hamper your ability to use the camera controls are essential basics for hours in the field. You will also have to think about protecting your equipment from the cold. Camera batteries tend to drain more quickly in freezing temperatures, so make sure you always pack a spare, fully charged battery and try to keep it warm either by wrapping it in your camera bag or by keeping it in a pocket close to your body.

Other common problems to be aware of in the field are lens misting and condensation. Try to let your camera acclimatise before taking any shots especially after removing the lens cap as this is when misting can occur. It's also a good idea to carry a lens cloth with you at all times.

Snow and Frost

Snow, frost and ice may be magical but capturing it on an image can present all kinds of problems to the landscape photographer; the most fundamental of which is exposure. Using your camera in full automatic mode when photographing snow or ice will play tricks with the metering system. The sensor will be fooled by the brightness of the landscape and will underexpose the scene. This will render the snow or ice as a shade of grey and everything else much darker than it should be. The best way to counteract this is to overexpose the scene. A general rule of thumb is to dial in +1 or +2 stops of compensation, but experiment and check your histogram regularly.

White balance can also be tricky to get right in camera. Snow tends to take on the colour of the surrounding light; in sunshine it appears white, in shadow bluish and in overcast conditions it appears grey. You can experiment with the white balance in camera but as I am shooting in RAW I tend to leave mine on auto and adjust in post processing.

Snow transforms a landscape and makes shapes and forms much more pronounced. Colours tend to be muted and subtle so it pays to look for something striking with a splash of colour to use as a focal point. If this is lacking try shooting at sunrise or sunset to add a

colour contrast to your landscape.



This image was taken on the River Ore.
Nikon D850, Nikon 24-70mm lens. F11 at 1/640 second, ISO 400, handheld.



This image was taken at Ramsholt Church.
Nikon D700, Nikon 24-70mm lens. F22 at 1/15 second, ISO 500, handheld.



This image was taken on the River Deben.
Niko D700, Nikon 24-70mm lens. F22 at 1/15 second, ISO 400, 0.6 ND grad filter.

When out in a snowy landscape try to think creatively about your image. If it looks a bit drab and there is no colour to lift it consider converting to black and white. This works really well if you have some good shapes, forms or textures in your composition.



This image was taken on Loch Lurgainn in Assynt.
Nikon D850, Nikon 24-70mm lens. F11 at 1/125 second, ISO 400 handheld.



This image was taken at Ardreck Castle in Assynt.
Nikon D850, Nikon 24-70mm lens. F16 at 1/8 second, ISO 400, 0.6 ND grad filter.

Snow may be an intermittent sight in the British landscape but ice is much more common and

can often result in some interesting and unusual images especially if you concentrate on detail shots. Air bubbles, cracks and debris trapped within ice can all make interesting subject matter. Make sure you choose your location carefully; frozen ponds and lakes can look wonderful but can be dangerous so I would suggest looking for puddles to concentrate on for detail shots. Use a polarising filter to cut down reflections and remember to check your exposure and dial in positive compensation if necessary. Other elements to look out for include hoar frost on trees, branches and other vegetation and icicles which can make very dramatic subject matter.

Snow and ice can dramatically transform the landscape but it is also great for adding contrast and interest to detail shots. Look out for plants, foliage and other small details



This image was taken on the beach at Ramsholt.
Nikon D700, Nikon 24-70mm. F16 at 1/60 second, ISO 400, flash.

Shooting in the fog

Fog can produce some really atmospheric images. To make the most of the conditions keep an eye on the weather forecast and have a few favourite locations in mind that you can visit if the conditions are favourable when you get up.

I use the Clear Outside app which tells me the temperature, wind speed, the humidity and the dew point. Fog is more likely at a humidity over 90% when the winds are light. It is also much more likely to form at dawn after a cold night.

Choose your location to suit the density of the fog. In thick fog I will always travel to the woods where the conditions help to simplify the compositions by cutting out the clutter around the trees. The fog also adds mood and atmosphere and helps simplify the colour pallet.



When considering what lens to use it is worth bearing in mind that a telephoto lens will compress the scene and make the fog appear thicker whilst a wide angle lens will have the opposite effect.

Once the sun starts to break through the fog you will get the opportunity for some lovely backlight images with rays of light shining through the trees.

When it comes to processing foggy images I tend to reduce the clarity in Lightroom as I want to keep that soft effect that fog creates. I may also add some dehaze and push the whites as far as they will go without over exposing. I will also tweak the blacks a little to introduce a little contrast within the scene.



Both the images on this page were taken with a Nikon D850
Left Image - Taken at Upper Hollesley Common with a 70-200mm lens. F16 at 1.3 seconds, ISO 400 with a polarising filter. The fog in this shot was quite thick and makes a nice background to the white trunks of the silver birch trees. I have toned down the greens and yellows in post processing to make them more muted and less saturated.
Above image - Taken in Tunstall Forest with a 24-70mm lens. F16 at 1/25 seconds, ISO 100. Shooting into the sun has given this image its feeling of warmth despite the snowy conditions and the rays of sunlight coming from the top of the shot help add to the atmosphere.

Rain

Many of us choose not to go out in the rain but as long as you have the right clothing and look after your equipment photography in the rain can be very rewarding.

I tend to head for the woods on a wet day. The rain really saturates the colours of the vegetation and the reduced visibility associated with drizzle acts a lot like fog obscuring the background and simplifying the image.

The image below was taken in Captains Wood on a day of heavy drizzle. The water has brought out all the colours and textures in the silver birch trees and has highlighted the vibrancy of the greens in the ditch and the orange bracken on the bank.

I used a polariser to take this shot but if you are doing this make sure you check it regularly as any water drops on the glass will show up on your image. A microfibre cloth or some lens wipes are a must for rainy day photography.



This image was taken in Captains Wood in Sudbourne. Nikon D850 with a Nikon 24-70mm lens. F16 at 0.8 seconds, ISO 100. I used a polariser to take some of the glare off the surfaces of the vegetation and to enhance the colours. you can see the rain has created the misty background.

The main issue with rainy days is that the sky is often flat and grey. To get round this it is often better to shoot subjects that allow you to cut out the sky altogether. Try woodlands, or if you are heading out of Suffolk to more hilly landscapes the options can be more varied.

The following images were all taken in Yorkshire and show three different waterfalls. When photographing fast flowing water the trick is to adjust your shutter speed to create the effect you are after. With very fast flowing water you only need a couple of seconds or less to create motion blur. If you expose for too long you get a really smooth effect while a shorter time will create some lovely texture and patterns in the water.



This image was taken at Gordale Scar in Malham, Yorkshire. Nikon D850 with a Nikon 24-70mm lens. F16 at 0.8 seconds, ISO 80 with a polarising filter. When shooting waterfalls it is a good idea to wear wellies or good walking boots to get close to the action. Try and eliminate the sky. The polarising filter helped reduce the glare from the wet rocks and was enough to give me a shutter speed of just under a second which helped me retain some texture in the falling water.



This image was taken at Wain Wath Force in Swaledale. Nikon D850 with a 24-70mm lens. F16 at 1.3 seconds, ISO 80 with a polarising filter. This enabled me to cut through the surface glare on the water to reveal the colourful stones beneath. The shutter speed of just over a second allowed me to retain some texture in the water and created the swirling patterns formed by the bubbles flowing in the fast moving current.



This image was taken at East Gill Force in Swaledale. Nikon D850 with a 24-70mm lens. F5.6 at 1/5 second, ISO 100 with a polarising filter. For this image I wanted to concentrate on the detail in the rock and the twiggy branches of the tree stuck in the falls. I chose quite a fast shutter speed to try and freeze the motion so that the movement of the twigs didn't show in the image.

Grey days

Grey days can provide some good photographic opportunities even if the skies look uninspiring. If you are going to work in colour try to find something that grabs your attention colour wise so that your image has a colourful focus point. If this is not available look for strong shapes and dynamic compositions and think about converting your image to black and white. If you are presented with moody skies work on a composition to make the most of the light. Try using a graduated filter to bring out the texture and detail in the clouds. If you are presented with flat grey skies then try working with some long exposures and coastal scenes.



This image was taken on Bawdsey Beach. Nikon D850, 24-70mm lens. F16 at 1/6 seconds, ISO 100. 0.6 ND grad filter.



This image was taken at Trimley Marshes. Nikon D850, 24-70mm lens. F14 at 12 seconds, ISO 100. 0.6 ND grad filter and a 6 stop ND filter.

December's challenge

This month's challenge is all about shooting winter landscapes.

Here are a few ideas to get your creativity flowing.

Take the following images:

1. A landscape scene that evokes the feeling of winter. Think about how the weather makes you feel and try to capture that in your image.

2. A scene shot on a rainy or foggy day - try to make the most of the conditions and pick your location accordingly.

3. A detail scene shot on a grey day. Try to eliminate the sky and concentrate on finding some interesting details to focus on. The diffused lighting present on a grey day should help with this.

I am really happy to offer feedback and would love to see your images so please get in touch gill@gillmoon.com



Inspiration

It may seem a challenge on some winter days to summon the enthusiasm to get outside in the cold or wet to take photos. So if you are struggling for some photographic inspiration here are a few videos I have found inspiring over the years.

On Landscape is an online magazine which has some great articles. It is something you have to pay to read, but it has some really interesting content and good discussions.

www.onlandscape.co.uk

Talks on YouTube

These are some of the talks that I have found inspiring over the last year. They all come from the Meeting of Minds conference which is an annual event (before Covid) They are all about 45 mins long but are worth watching for the insight they give into other photographers approach to their work.

Sandra Bartocha - On self expression, creativity and the essence of landscapes

www.youtube.com/watch?v=hcC9cmVEgYw

A talk by Mark LittleJohn about using split toning in his landscape photography

www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMKTtylgS2w&feature=emb_logo

A talk by Charlie Waite talking about beauty in photography, what this is and how we capture that essence of the landscape.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbUmjkhjjZ0

Theo Bosboom - Shaped by the Sea

A talk by Theo about his coastal photography project.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MU4Q4sl0KUQ>

Lizzie Shepherd - On Overlooked landscapes - Mood versus composition.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VKEbWkyij4

David Ward - On Overlooked landscapes

www.youtube.com/watch?v=PW8cPcogNYE

Joe Cornish - Overlooked - talking about practice in landscape photography.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-G27Fdgx50

Workshops for 2021

My schedule of workshops and photo walks for 2021 will be released in January, but here are a few details to whet your appetite:

Spring Woodland Workshop at Captains Wood

A 3 hour workshop timed to coincide with the bluebells.

www.landscapephotographytuition.co.uk/product/spring-woodlands-workshop-april-24th-aprilphotography-tuition

Floral Shingle Street - an extra workshop focusing on the varied coastal habitat at Shingle Street.

Full day shoot and process - A workshop of two halves. A morning spent out in the field followed by an afternoon of post processing using Lightroom in my studio at Hollelsey.

Part of the landscape - Connecting with the natural world through photography.

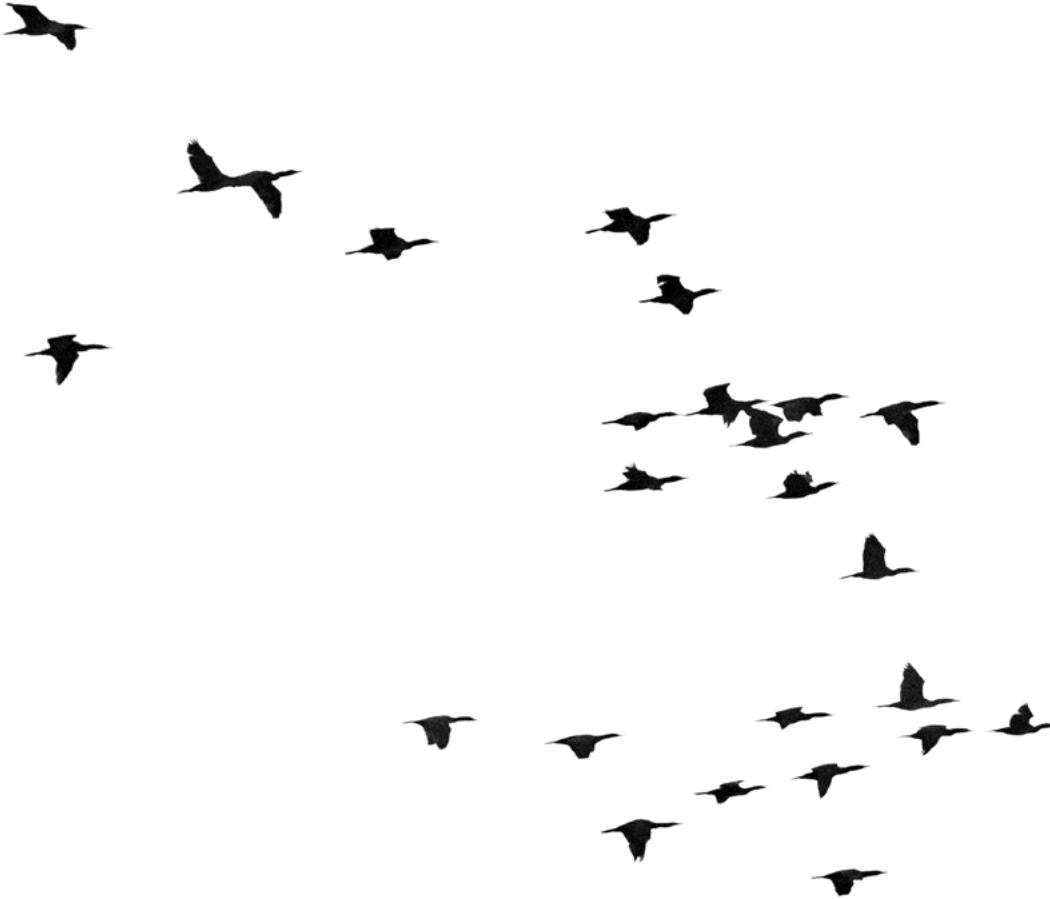
This is a new course based on the idea that a close connection with the landscape will result in more meaningful images. The course will be part self study with feedback using a workbook and part group workshop. It will be available from the spring.

If you would like further information about any of these workshops please don't hesitate to get in touch

gill@gillmoon.com

‘AN EARLY MORNING WALK
IS A BLESSING FOR THE
WHOLE DAY’

Henry David Thoreau



Grounded

A year of nature connections on Hollesley Marshes captured during 2020.

The images portray fleeting moments observed during a morning walk. They were not pre planned, were shot without a tripod or filters and represent my reaction to a scene at a particular moment in time. They are accompanied by text and are intended to be viewed as a visual sketchbook of a special place.

Grounded will be published in January as a limited run of 100 editions, all numbered and signed.

Pre Orders now available £28

www.gillmoon.com/projects/grounded-book