



Shoot for the Moon

Monthly news and tips from Landscape Photographer
Gill Moon

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Hello

Welcome to my latest edition of 'Shoot for the Moon'

This edition is all about Post Processing.

I see a lot of people on my workshops, some love the post processing side of photography whilst others hate it and see it as image manipulation which devalues the art of taking a 'proper photograph.'

I am a firm believer that post processing is an art form and is there to help you bring out the best from your RAW files. Good post processing will never turn a bad image into a good one. You have to have taken a good image in the first place. But poor post processing can ruin an image, so here is my guide to getting it right.

If you have any comments or thoughts on any aspect of photography I am always keen to receive your emails so please get in touch if you have anything you would like to share.

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

What is post processing?

Post processing is the phrase that we use to cover everything that is done to the photograph after it has been taken. The process has always been an important part of photography even in the days of film. Photographers would employ techniques such as dodging (lightening) and burning (darkening) to make their images more impactful and to guide the viewers eye through the frame.

Today the darkroom is our computer screen and although the process is very different the fundamentals are the same - we process our images to make them complete. Post processing is an integral part of the art of photography and in my opinion is something that you should practice and perfect if you want to make eye catching and impactful photographs.

RAW files and JPEG files - what are they?

There are two ways to capture images in camera. We can choose to shoot in RAW or JPEG.

A RAW file is a recording of all the information in the scene. It is unprocessed and a straight representation of what the camera "saw".

A JPEG is a compressed edited file (the acronym stands for Joint Photographic Experts Group, after the group of people who created this method of compression).

When you take an image as a JPEG file the camera applies a series of algorithms to compress the file in camera. Due to this compression process any edits you make subsequently in post processing will result in a slight loss of quality.

In camera compression means that JPEG files are smaller than RAW files and they are suitable for using online or for print straight

out of the camera. RAW files are not. They are much larger because they contain more data but they need to be processed so that you can print them or share them online.

You will notice that if you shoot in both RAW + JPEG mode, the RAW file will always be more flat in appearance and the JPEG more rich. This is because of the algorithms that are applied when the JPEG is created.

Because RAW files contain unprocessed data any editing you subsequently do on them will be non destructive and you will always be able to revert back to the original 'as shot' file.

RAW files are much larger than JPEG's and as a result contain much more information. Because of this they allow greater flexibility in post production.

RAW files also record at a greater bit depth than JPEG's and so have more information recorded across the tonal range and in the shadows and highlights.

To sum up when you shoot in RAW you capture all the information from a scene in an uncompressed and raw state.

When you shoot in JPEG you are allowing the camera to compress your file and make decisions (by the use of algorithms) as to how it appears.



How I process my images.

All my images are shot in RAW and are processed using Lightroom and Photoshop. This software is Licensed by Adobe and is available on a monthly subscription. The photography package which includes Lightroom Classic and Photoshop costs £9.98 per month and this is what I use to process my images.

www.adobe.com/uk/creativecloud/plans.

I have also been looking at alternative software for those who don't wish to pay a subscription. Here I would recommend looking at Affinity Photo which costs £47.99 as a one off fee. This works a little like Lightroom and Photoshop combined and allows you to do most of what the adobe packages offer.

<https://affinity.serif.com/en-gb/photo>

Workflow

All my images are downloaded from the camera directly into my Lightroom catalogue. From here I will scroll through all the shots and work out which (if any) I want to process.

During my selection process I will be looking for the images with the best light, composition, exposure and mood. Even if shots are taken in close succession there will often be quite large differences between them so the selection process is critical. I find that the best images just jump out at you - they are usually obvious.

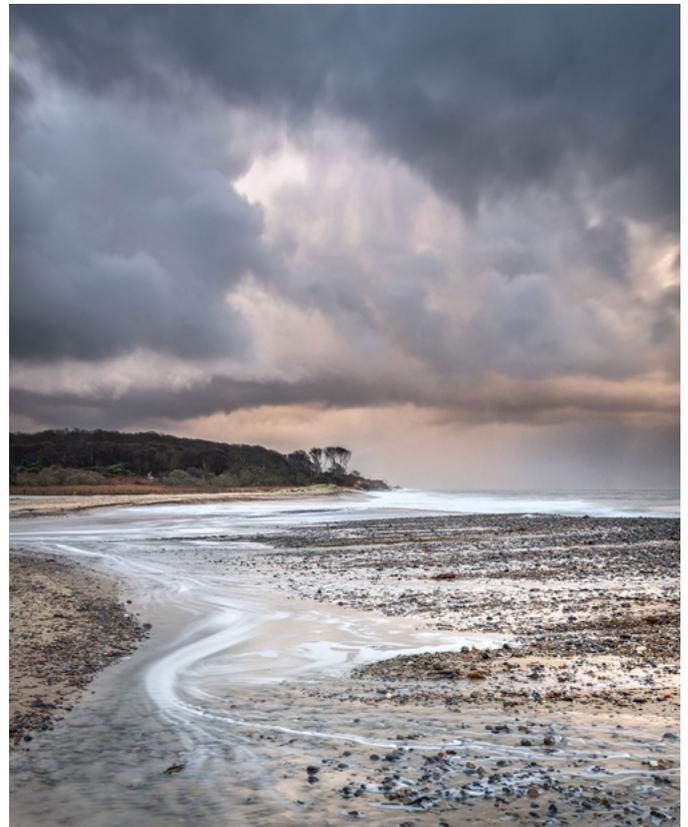
Post processing is an essential part of image making but it will never turn a bad photo into a good one. If the composition or light is not right in the original file no amount of post processing is going to rescue the image.

The following pages of this edition are given over to some of the images I have processed recently. I will tell you my thought process before I worked on each image. I will then give you a brief outline for what I did with each shot and you will be able to compare the

before and after images.

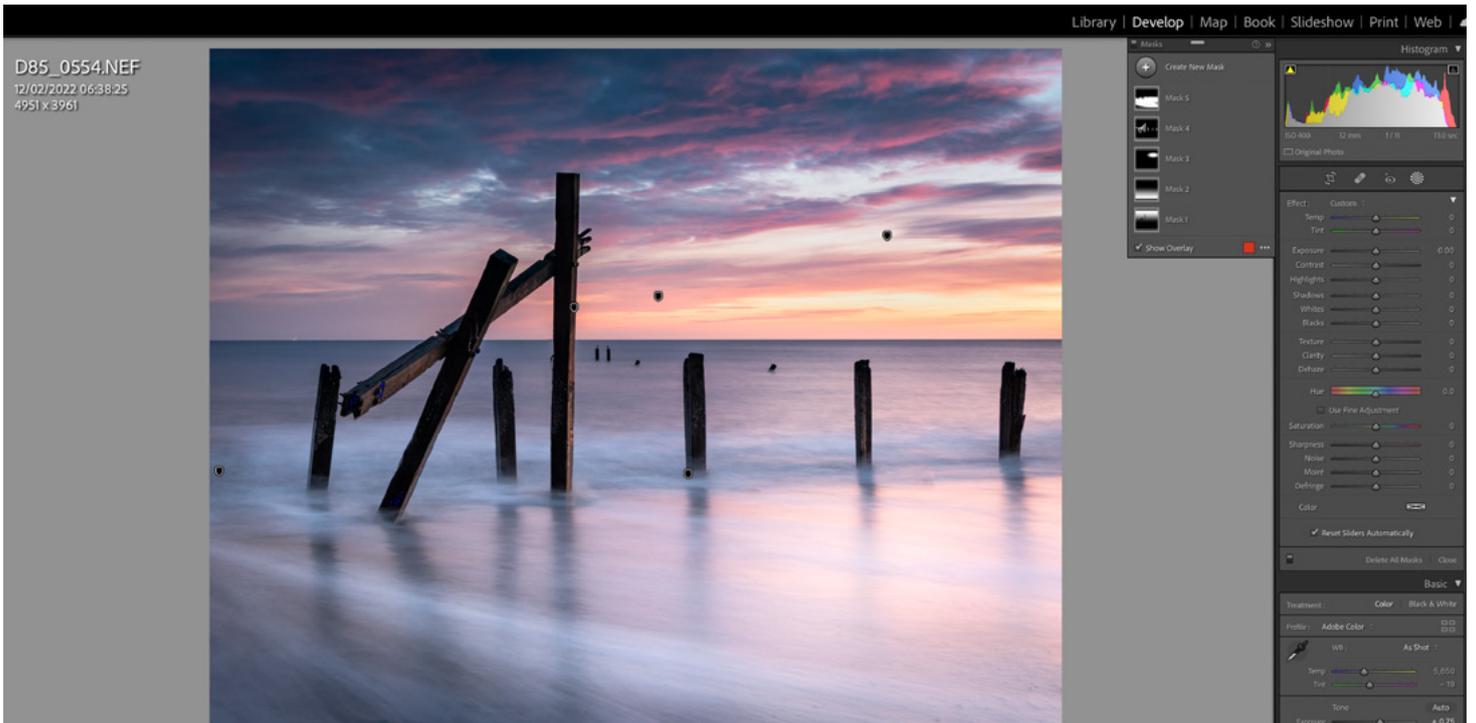
Post Processing is not cheating. It doesn't somehow detract from the integrity of an image. To my mind it is a creative process which allow you to bring the best out of the information captured in the RAW file.

I like to process my images as soon as I have arrived home from a shoot. The sooner I do it the more I can remember about the session and the more I can draw on my memory to help develop the final image.



Happisburgh Seascape





I am going to start this section with an image I took at sunrise on the beach at Happisburgh. The two images show the RAW file at the top and my processed shot underneath.

You will see that the RAW file is much flatter, a little darker and a different aspect ratio.

The shooting settings for this image were:

ISO 400

F11

13 second exposure

a focal length of 32mm using a 24-70mm lens.

I also used a 6 stop filter and a 0.6 reverse grad to try and balance the bright part of the sky with the sea.

The reason I used an ISO of 400 was to achieve the shutter speed I was looking for whilst exposing for the bright parts of the sky.

When I selected this image to work on I decided that the 'out of camera' aspect ratio didn't really work for me so I cropped using a 10 x 8 ratio. Basically I wanted the depth in the image but not the width - especially the left hand side of the shot which has no visual interest.

I also wanted to simplify the scene by removing the clutter on the right hand side. I made a decision to remove the distant posts near the horizon as well. I felt these detracted from the 'simplicity' of the cropped image.

Next I felt that I wanted to bring out the light and texture in the wooden posts, highlight the white streaks in the water and make sure the reflections and colours showed up in the sand. I wanted my sky to be a little lighter than shot and not quite as warm.

My workflow in Lightroom was to

- Check the profile corrections and chromatic aberration.

- Crop the image.

- Check the white balance, exposure, shadows and highlights across the whole shot.

- Work on individual areas of the scene using linear gradients, radial gradients and brushes.

The screen shot above shows the position of the masks I used and the separate areas I worked on to achieve the finished result.

Happisburgh Seascape 2



My thought process for this image

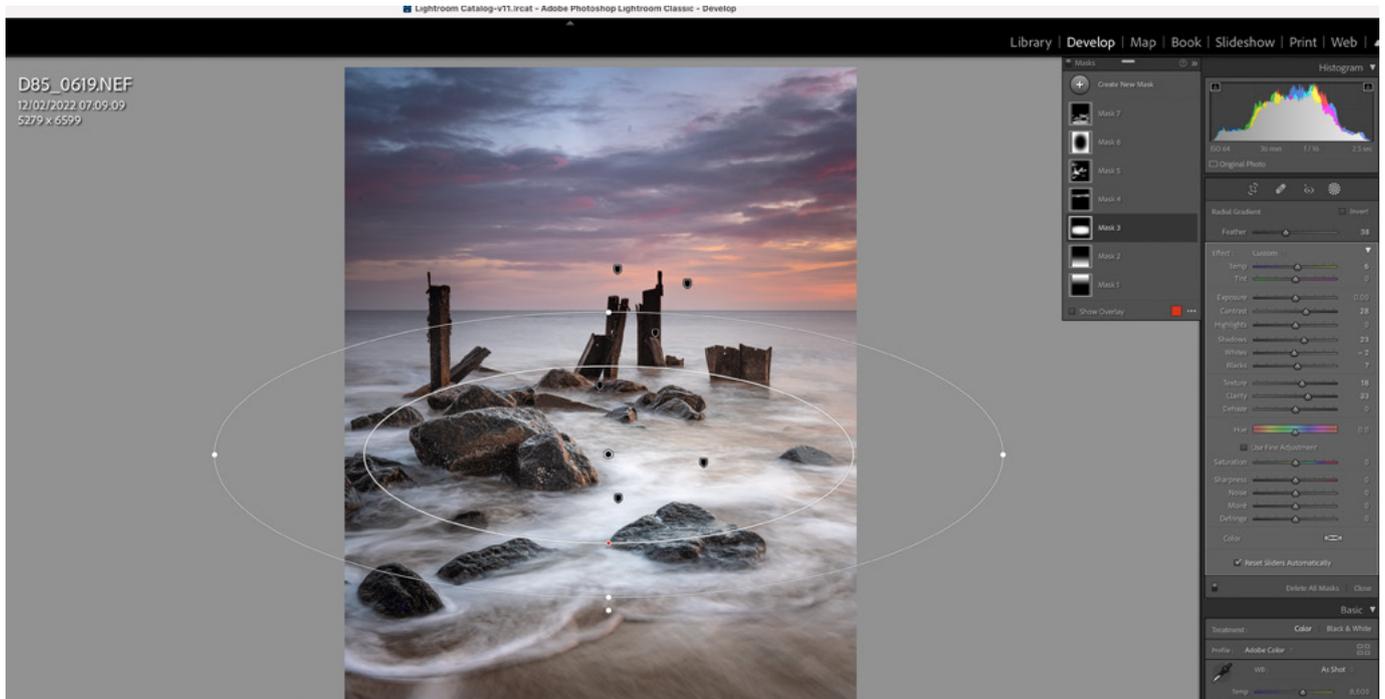
Change the aspect ratio.

Lighten the image and get rid of the drab effect in the sky which is caused by the white balance being too warm.

Bring out the colour in the foreground sand.

Enhance the whites in the streaks and curved water.

Bring out the shadow detail in the rocks and metal.



This seascape was shot during the same sunrise session as the image we have just discussed.

The first shot here is the RAW file and the second shot is the processed image.

You can see that the RAW file is quite dark and very flat. The camera settings for this image were:

ISO 64

F16

2.5 second exposure

a focal length of 36mm on a 24 - 70mm lens.

I also used a 0.6 grad filter and a 6 stop ND filter to slow the exposure a little. I needed to achieve the correct shutter speed for the streaky water effect whilst making sure that I didn't over expose the sky or the white parts of the water.

The reason I chose this image to work on was because I liked the wave patterns, particularly the curved shapes and the streaky lines in the front of the image.

When looking at the RAW file I decided that the 'out of camera' aspect ratio didn't work for me - there was too much sky and a little

too much foreground. I felt that a shorter crop whilst keeping the width would work better so I have used a 10 x 8 crop again.

My other thoughts are outlined under the image.

The screen shot above shows the masks that I have used on this image and where I have applied them to achieve the result that I outlined in my thought process.

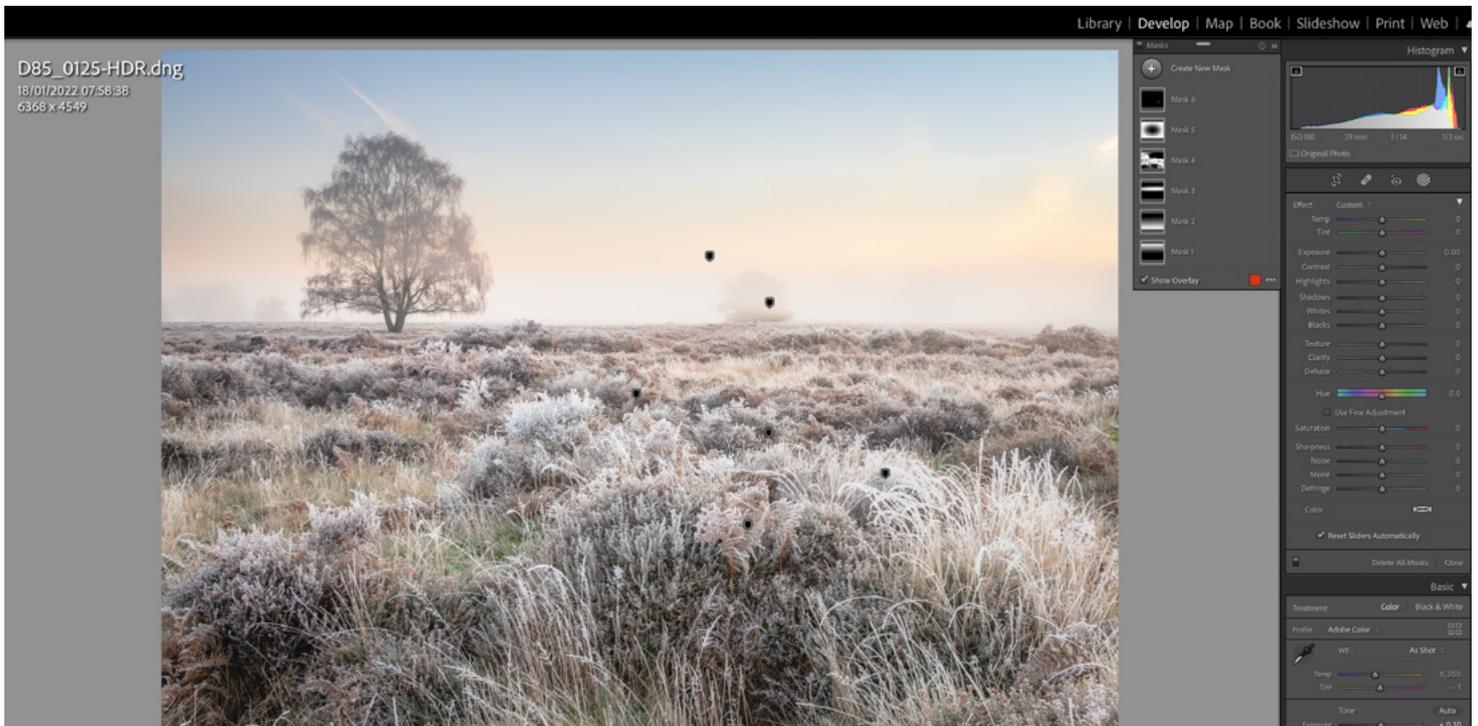
I have cooled down the colour temperature of the sky, lightened the sea and waves, brought out the shadow detail and some of the colours in the rocks and saturated some areas of the water to bring out the reflected sky colours. I have also used some dodging and burning to lighten or darken certain areas which helps lead the eye through the frame.

Although the final image looks quite different from the RAW file I am only working with the information that the camera has recorded.

It is important to remember that this is all part of the creative process and the skill is knowing what you want to achieve and how to do it.

Hollesley Common





This image was taken on Upper Hollesley Common on a very frosty and misty morning. I wanted to capture the sun rising over the cold landscape. My composition was arranged around this large silver birch and I used all the different foreground plants to lead the eye towards the tree.

The shooting information for this image was:
ISO 100
F14
1/3 second exposure
a focal length of 29mm using a 24 - 70mm lens.
I also used a 0.6 medium graduated filter to balance the brighter sky with the foreground.

When looking at the RAW file my thought process was to:

- Brighten the overall image.
- Bring out the colour in the sky.
- Lighten the highlights so that the frost looks bright white and not grey.
- Bring out the colours in the grasses and heather and also make the texture in the foreground more obvious.
- Emphasise the lines of foliage that lead the eye towards the tree.

My first job is always to apply the profile

corrections for my lens and check the chromatic aberration box. Then I cropped the image and adjusted the overall exposure, highlights and shadows. I also used the luminance sliders for yellow, orange and green to highlight some of the areas of foliage.

Next I applied the masks you can see above.

I then opened this image in Photoshop and cloned out some of the plane trails in the sky as well as the dust spots on my sensor!

I also did my dodging and burning in Photoshop focusing on the dark shadow areas for my burning (darkening) and the highlights on the tops of the plants for my dodging (lightening).

I prefer to use Photoshop for all my cloning, and dodging and burning.

Dovercourt Lighthouse



This image was shot at Dovercourt Bay. It is an iconic location and it often feels difficult to get a different take on a familiar location.

When I visited it was about 2 hours after sunrise and the light was quite strong, a bit hazy and coming in from one side of the lighthouse.

My settings for this shot were:

ISO 31

F16

2.5 second exposure

30mm focal length with a 24-70mm lens.

I used a 0.6 ND hard graduated filter and a 6 stop ND filter. As the sun was bright I had to lower my ISO to its lowest setting to get my desired shutter speed of 2.5 seconds. My intention was to smooth out the sea and create a contrast between the patterned foreground

and the smooth water.

I liked the composition of my RAW file but I didn't like the light or the colours and so decided that a mono conversion would be the best approach.

Having selected black and white I used the colour mixing pallet to create the desired effect.

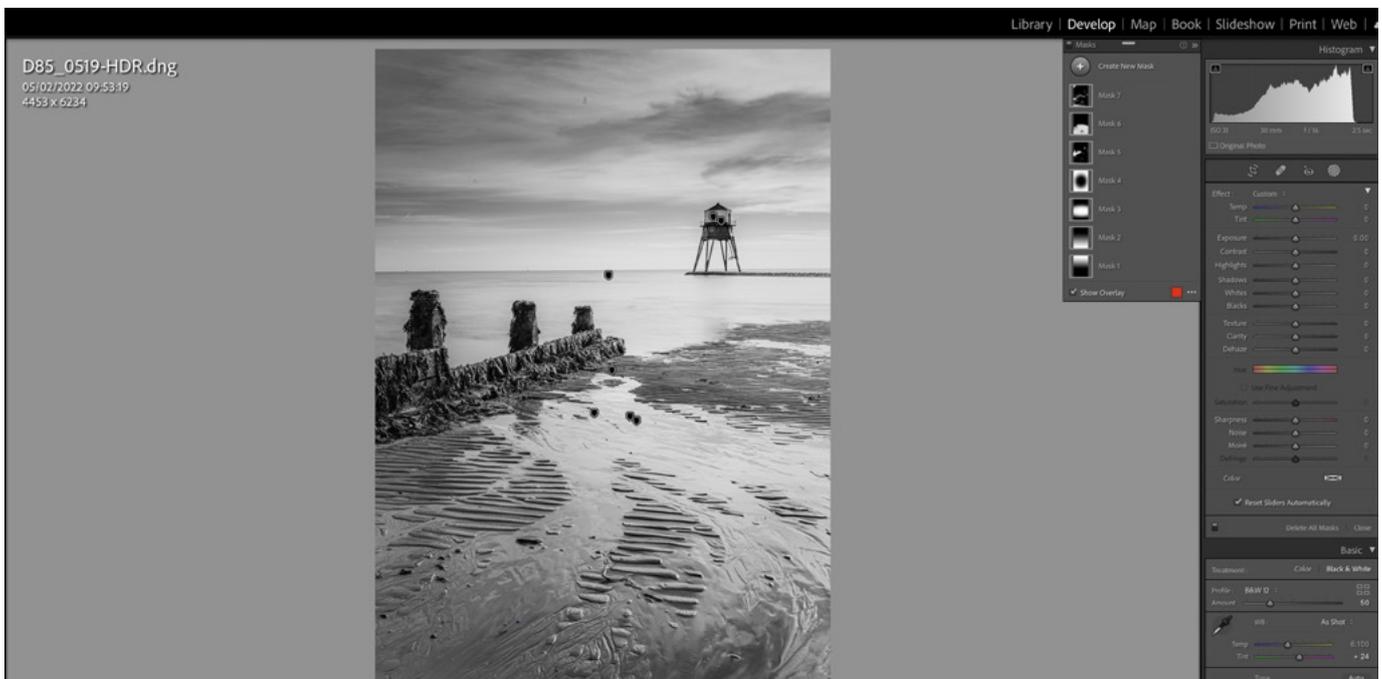
My thought process for developing this image was to

Crop to a slightly shorted by wider 10 x 8 format.

Lighten the shadows across the whole image.

Bring out the detail in the lighthouse and the groynes.

Emphasise the contrast between the



shadows and the highlights in the sand patterns.

Bring out the contrast and detail in the sky.

Black and white conversions work on the contrast between dark and light areas within the image, so my processing became about emphasising this.

The screen shot above shows the masks I have used in processing this image.

I used linear grads for the sky and foreground, a radial filter to add a vignette and some brushes and luminance masks to work on areas of shadow and highlights.

I finished the image off with some dodging and burning in Photoshop.

I feel that the key to post processing is knowing what you want to achieve. You need to be able to identify the areas of an image that need work and, just as importantly, what work they require. Think about it in terms of areas of shadow and highlight, contrast and luminance. Working on these elements

introduces impact into an image and impact gets your pictures noticed.

Post Processing Courses

If you would like help with your post processing I have a lovely studio equipped with two Macs running Lightroom, Photoshop and Affinity Photo.

I offer a range of post processing courses which include a **half day introduction to Lightroom / Photoshop or Affinity Photo**. These are 1-2-1 courses which can take place during a morning or afternoon. They cover photo editing of RAW files from working out what you want to achieve, through to general adjustments and masking using linear, radial, luminance, colour filters and brushes. I also cover some basics in Photoshop.

At the end of the session you should have enough knowledge to process your images with confidence.

My half day courses are £95 and include a set of notes and your processed files to take away.

To book a session please email me with your preferred date gill@gillmoon.com

Full Day Photography and Lightroom Tuition

Join me for a photography day of two halves. This 1-2-1 session features a morning spent out in the field followed by an afternoon of post processing using Lightroom or Affinity in my studio at Hollelsey.

For the morning we will explore one of the beautiful locations which I am lucky enough to have on my doorstep. You can choose from the coast at Bawdsey or Shingle Street, the River Deben at Ramsholt, the heathland at Sutton or the woods at Upper Hollesley Common or Staverton Thicks. All these locations are a 10 minute drive from my studio.

After a morning in the field we will come back to my studio and spend the afternoon processing your shots and learning how to get the most out of Lightroom or Affinity. You will go away with processed and print ready files.

For this session you are welcome to choose between processing in Lightroom or Affinity.

My full day Photo and Process workshop costs £185 and is a 1-2-1 session.

For more information see www.landscapephotographytuition.co.uk/product/photo-process-photography-lightroom-tuition

