

photoworld



2009/#3



Cover: by Carl McKie
Carl caught this harvest mouse feeding on wheat in an Oxfordshire field last month. He used his Alpha 700 with 50mm f2.8 AF macro lens, ISO 400, and a relatively wide aperture of f4 to get a fast shutter speed. The field is a protected site for re-introducing the species. "I have privileged access to one of these sites so finding them is somewhat easier for me", he tells us. "The juvenile mice had left the nest, so several were in the area. The rest is down to observation and patience."

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Photoworld magazine is an independent quarterly from Icon Publications Ltd which provides free membership of the Photoworld Club UK/Photoclubalpha. The aim of the Club is to provide support services, information, inspiration and activities for owners of Minolta, Konica Minolta, Seagull, Sony Alpha and other equipment compatible with the Minolta SR, MC, MD, VS, AF, AF-xi and AF-D mounts. Membership of the Club is not dependent on subscription and you may also sign up, receiving emailed information only but no magazine, through www.photostore-uk.com, www.minoltaclub.co.uk or www.photoclubalpha.com. Subscriptions cost £19.95 for four issues (UK/Europe), £23.95 (Rest of World), payable to Icon Publications Ltd, Maxwell Place, Maxwell Lane, Kelso, Scottish Borders TD5 7BB. This publication has no connection with Konica Minolta Holdings or Sony Corporation, or the brands mentioned. The logo typeface is 'Minolta Classic' designed by Justin Bailey.

HELPLINES AND INFORMATION

Authorised & warranty repairs, assistance and enquiries

OUR website www.photoclubalpha.com is now packed with detailed features on the Minolta and Sony Alpha systems, has a busy discussion **Forum** and you can search the site for help on topics. It has a full directory of useful links for downloading software or obtaining help. For personal advice from the Club, use e-mail only please, to david@photoclubalpha.com.

A **DEDICATED** helpline is available for Konica Minolta Dynax and Dimage digital system owners, and also for film camera owners. The helpline phone number is **0870 0104107**.

ALL REPAIRS for Konica, Minolta and Konica Minolta branded photographic products are handled by;

JP Service Solutions
 Johnsons Photopia Ltd
 Hempstalls Lane
 Newcastle under Lyme
 Staffordshire ST5 0SW
 Tel: 01782 753366 – Fax: 01782 753340
 Email: kmsupport@jpss.co.uk

SONY may announce further firmware upgrades or indeed products. Your first step should be to check Sony's website regularly:

www.sony.co.uk

Their general helpline, which will have information on any other numbers, addresses, departments or offices which Konica Minolta owners may need to reach in future, is: **08705 111 999**

For downloadable printable manuals, legacy firmware and software updates, visit:

<http://ca.konicaminolta.com/support/americas/>

For the Sony European user service – there is still no UK user club:

<http://www.sony.co.uk/nextlevel>

To order KM/Sony parts, accessories, and new Sony flash components etc, visit the Photostore, where Bernard Petticrew also hosts an advice forum:

<http://www.photostore-uk.com/>

MINOLTA REPAIRS

by specialist workshop in Milton Keynes

FOR MANY years **Camera Repair Workshop**, based in Milton Keynes close to the original Minolta UK service department, handled the repair of classic SRT, X, Vectis and later film cameras for Minolta UK.

They have obtained many of the spare parts and KM's stocks of older 'cannibalisation cameras' like 7000 and 8000i. Their proprietor is David Boyle, and his two technicians are Minolta trained. As an independent repairer they will specialise in film and digital, and hold parts going back to models like the XM. *The Dynax 9 is an exception, previously serviced by a special European centre, and must be sent to JP (see above).* No VAT is chargeable at present, and they offer Photoworld Club members a **10 per cent** discount on prices which they say are already better than former retail repair charges. This enables the Club to continue with its 10 per cent service and repair discount offer.

The **Photoworld Club Camera Check** scheme will be operated by Camera Repair Workshop, though in absence of Konica Minolta's former bulk shipping arrangements, the return carriage costs have increased and a charge of **£25 per camera/standard lens** combination is now required.

Your equipment is bench-tested for shutter speed, metering, focusing and aperture accuracy, externally cleaned and adjusted (this includes mirror box and film track, and all accessible parts or adjustments). If performance is below standard, a quotation will be issued for optional servicing. A certificate is completed showing the test results and functions checked, and returned with the camera. Camera Repair Workshop were actually responsible for most of the Club Camera Check work, and hold a stock of original 'Minolta Club' certificates along with all the necessary bench testing equipment.

They are based at:

Unit 9, Wharfside, Bletchley, Milton Keynes MK2 2AZ.

Telephone 01908 378088, fax 08712 427677.

Email: cameraworkshop@tiscali.co.uk

Alpha 380 on test

David Kilpatrick looks at the best of the three new Alphas which reached the shops this summer, the 14.2 megapixel Alpha 380

My Sony Alpha 380 was supposed to arrive before July 13th according to a Hong Kong internet trader – via Amazon – claiming UK despatch. Well, it didn't, and after some email exchanges I have apparently obtained a refund for the charge they made for an item they did not have. Warehouse Express had got them by that time, for £10 less, and delivered in 24 hours.

Sony is causing me problems because I prefer to buy products to test – it removes the ridiculous one or two week windows allowed for loan review kit, which often coincide with some very busy period making it impossible to give the gear adequate attention. There is a threat that three more Alpha models will appear this year called the Alpha 500, 550 and 850. That indicates at least two new levels or types of Alpha. I'm running out of cash to keep up with this!

The Alpha 380 is a replacement for the 350, a 14.2 megapixel compact DSLR with Live View. I already own a 350 and find it useful because the excellent resolution is combined with an impressive dynamic range and unusual colour palette. The pictures from the 350 have a unique appeal, and in some ways the CGD sensor is better than the CMOS of the Alpha 700 for landscape and pictorial work with fine detail, assuming you are able to shoot at ISO 100.

I had to hand over just under £600 for my 380 with 18-55mm SAM kit lens. SAM stands for Smooth Autofocus Motor, and what it appears to mean is electric motor not sonic wave-type drive. Instead of being focused via the body motor and drive coupling – which the 380 retains – the lens is operated electronically for all functions apart from aperture closure.

There was an expectation that the SAM 18-55mm f3.5-5.6 would equal the latest Nikon and Canon lenses of the same specification and leave behind the reputation of the 18-70mm Konica Minolta/Sony kit lens.

It does not feel as good as its rivals; it is a plain, lightweight item. Optically, the corners are soft at 18mm unless stopped down; the SAM focus motor is nearly as noisy as a screw drive lens when it starts up. The front rim rotates during focusing; there is no focusing scale; the mount is plastic. Redeeming qualities include very good performance from 35 to 55mm. Within this range,

The power switch is moved to a collar round the shutter release – which also moves to a new location, the control wheel now below it.



The Alpha 380 with new SAM 18-55mm lens looks neat with a very clean exterior design. The SAM lens, below, takes 55mm filters and is a little smaller than the earlier 18-70mm kit lens. It uses an in-lens focus motor and has a rear plastic mount with an excellent black matt finish.



The articulated screen is hinged from the middle, not the top as in the A300/350. It feels firmer in use, but still fails to provide well for vertical framing.



it's sharp wide open and has good coverage corner to corner, together with virtually no chromatic aberration. At 18mm it is poor wide open because of corner fall off, and around 24mm it's if anything slightly worse.

Good points include the closest minimum focus around, 25cm or a 0.34X subject scale, and class leading flare resistance. Light sources included in-frame throw up no reflections, and the rear of the lens is extremely well blackened with some kind of matt coating on the plastic. A lot of attention has been paid to killing internal reflections and boosting contrast.

The close-up ability makes it the closest focusing lens in the entire Alpha system except for the Macro 100 and 50mm designs.

The end result is a lens which will produce very good looking snapshots and really does not need the lens hood which is no longer supplied. Sony has cut costs; you don't get a proper rear lens cap, just a 'milk



bottle top' as it has been dubbed, and you don't get a lens hood any more.

I bet it's all down to market research – they went out and observed users, only to discover that over 50% of users leave the lens hood on, backwards.

Also, they have made the flash pop up higher on the A380. Combine this with the smaller 18-55mm lens, and no hood supplied – result, one third life size macro shots with full flash illumination and no shadow cast by the lens/hood.

Why so much focus on the lens?

Well, the camera body was already known before delivery to be a cut-down version of the A350 in terms of size and dedicated controls. The 18-55mm lens was the first of a new line of SAM optics, a brand new design. It is supposedly more a Sony product than earlier kit lenses (just as the 16-105mm is).

While the lens is definitely a better performer you certainly don't need to replace a proven 18-70mm with it. The new SAM 30mm f2.8 macro and 50mm f1.8 portrait lenses look more interesting, and they may well have quieter motors.

If this lens was significantly better from 18-28mm wide open, felt better built and the SAM motor was not so noisy when starting up and parking it would be a closer match to the competitors' designs.

Tidy thinking

The Alpha 380 body has features you may positively want, like the higher pop up flash position and new rear LCD. It has an even smaller profile than the A200, A350 or any other previous Alpha mount DSLR. It is Dynax 5 sized with some hidden extra thickness to the body. A clever design feature makes this appear like a wrap round a slimmer core, the illusion created by the different colour of the top plate.

The shape of the right hand grip has changed completely. It is now designed for a delicate finger-hold, not a curled fist. Needless to say this was immediately liked by women not just because of the size, but because it promotes a more elegant hand position. Even this *bloke* felt that it encouraged a sense of precision, the same way the Minolta CLE used to. You have to hold it carefully, so you also tend to use it carefully.

The shutter release position changes. It is in a standard position found on cameras for over 80 years – on the top!

Unlike a front-grip mounted release, it CAN be worked with the thumb when holding the camera in Live View arm's length position. This is a common way of holding compact cameras.

The On/Off switch is now round the shutter release, Nikon-style (switched clockwise instead of anti). I like the old left hand power switch inherited from Minolta, but I can live with this change.

The control wheel moves to the front above the grip, instead of on top. This takes more getting used to, but it is just as intuitive once you learn the position. Most A380 (or 230, or



Details of the Alpha 380 – top, with lens removed; on-off switch and shutter release; duplicated on-lens and on-camera AF/MF switches; recessed mode dial; the sliding side door which reveals interfaces and card slots. Below: new look graphic help on the LCD screen, a good feature for new users which can be turned off if preferred.

The old button functions are moved to the rear control pad or to on-screen menus



330) buyers will be coming from non-DSLR digicams and it does not have to match other Alpha models.

Loads of buttons appear to be missing, and the rear four-way controller pad has their functions instead. I found this worked pretty well. Selecting or moving the focus point is now moved into a menu option. This might seem clumsy, but I accidental shifting of the focus point by the controller pad has been a problem for me since the Dynax 7D. I tend to use centre spot focus all the time, and this camera for once did not override me because of some brief contact with the wrong bit of a control pad. It remained firmly set to centre spot.

All is not perfect. The right hand press of the pad invokes a flash options menu. My thumb kept pressing this and bringing up flash options without my wanting them. This led to one situation where the flash got itself set to 'on' and popped up in broad daylight, forcing the shutter speed to an incorrect setting and ruining a shot. There is no provision to lock the control pad and prevent such accidents.

I found the menu-based settings just as quick to use as the Alpha 350's slightly more button-biased ergonomics. It's a little frustrating that you can not navigate through various options, and have to confirm each one before accessing another. Also, the menu items consistently ask you to press OK when there is no button on the camera marked OK – it is the central 'AF' button of the pad controller. This may confuse.

The inset main mode control dial is a neat feature, well designed and just as easy to use as one which sticks up higher.

All in all, the multipurpose function use of the pad controller – which loses its original function for directly controlling AF point – is similar to many point and shoot digicams. For a while I had a Konica Minolta G600 which had a similar set of functions on its four-way pad.

Every main function or adjustment you can make on an A350 is also available on the A380, at the worst you need an extra button push. The exception is selection of any of the nine focus points (with an improved screen marking to show them) which takes many presses to achieve.

Extra features

What, then, has been added to the A380 relative to the A350?

The first addition involves subtraction. They have removed the remote control socket entirely, and you can no longer fit a corded remote.

Instead, the A230/330/380 all use the same **RMT-DSLR1** wireless remote release and playback controller that is supplied with the Alpha 700 and 900.

That's good news for us, we have two already. It's not such good news for others, as the control is not provided with the camera and must be purchased as an optional accessory.

If you use a tripod, the new models feature an extra 10 second self-timer multi shot mode which does away with the need for a remote release in self or group portrait shots. A three or five shot set (not bracketed, all the same exposure) is taken at the standard motor-drive speed which is a modest 2.5fps for all three cameras.

The five shot set gives more time for people in a group to make silly faces or change pose. Three shots can catch random expressions but by the time you realise the camera is operating, the last shot is taken.

But there is a caution. Many such pictures are taken at parties, or gatherings indoors. If you enable the 3 or 5 shot self timer, you *disable the built-in flash entirely*. The tiny battery of the new cameras would never be able to recycle the flash fast enough, especially at group distances (the official recycling time is 4 seconds). To use flash with this mode, you must attach an accessory gun. The camera can not tell whether direct or bounce flash is being used, so there is still some risk of losing pictures if you discharge the gun fully.

Cards and connections

The new models are much improved for HDTV playback. They have a standard HDMI mini socket, similar to the A700 and A900, and are controllable via Bravia Sync when connected to a compatible Sony TV. The television remote control can then browse pictures on the camera's memory cards, run slide shows with the facility to zoom and pan individual shots.

USB connectivity is improved by switching from a special USB connector to the standard mini USB used by most portable hard disks, card readers and similar devices. A cable is supplied. The old USB to video function, for feeding images to traditional televisions using a bunch of phono plugs, is gone.

Finally, the card compatibility leaves CompactFlash behind and switches over to a dual Memory Stick Pro Duo HG and SecureDigital HD choice. The slots are very close together and the card contacts must face inwards so you have to remember that SD and MS cards face in opposite directions when



The Alpha 380 kit contains camera, strap, lens, lenscap, battery, charger, eyepiece cover, and USB cable. The literature provided in the box includes full instructions.



quick start guide, and even the box packaging has a panel suggesting some accessory purchases.

In the manual, it is made very clear that the A230-380 models are not dustproof, moisture proof or splashproof.

There are small changes to both the optical viewfinder and the rear LCD, both to allow a slightly slimmer body. The viewfinder eye relief is reduced to a normal 19.7mm from the A350's better than average 20.8mm, and at -1 dioptre (a common correction setting) the difference is A380 14.1mm, A350 16.7mm. That is a 2.6mm change in the safe distance from the eyepiece for viewing the entire screen for a typical user.

The rear LCD is claimed to be brighter, but I still found it difficult to use in sunshine. The new accessory hood might be advisable.

The articulated screen mechanism is tighter, packing the screen closer to the body, requiring a little more force to operate because it hinges from the screen centre. It allows a slightly better overhead view, but less angle range as a 'waist level finder', and keeps the screen closer to the body all the time.

Having used the Nikon D5000 with its rotate and tilt mechanism, I realise the A300/350/330/380 design is flawed – it offers no provision for vertical composition. You can view with the camera above your head but only for landscape compositions, and the same goes for waist or ground level use. I've used many cameras with live view, and with articulated screens – the Sony Cybershot DSC R-1 was one of the best ever designed. The A3xx series is one of the most basic solutions, it is not even possible to protect the screen by reversing it against the camera body. I regularly shoot with the D5000 and keep the screen folded away if I feel no need to 'chimp' or use live view. I don't need a screen protector as it is always stored reversed.

The big question remains – is the image from the A380 a step up from



The standard Alpha battery NP-FM500H compared to the new small NP-FH50.

inserted. There is a switch to change between the cards, instead of tedious menu-diving as found on the Alpha 900 and 700. It takes a second or so for the camera to make the change, and there is no automatic overflow or simultaneous recording option.

Given the very low price of memory in both the Sony MemoryStick Pro Duo and more widely used SD format, the necessary 2GB minimum needed for a reasonable number of shots works out cheaper than film. You really don't need a portable storage device, or a card reader, with the A230-380 series. The standard

mini USB connection enables the camera to act as a fast card reader.

The neat sliding door which covers the interfaces is a good design, with a tethered push fit plastic cover on the right hand end for the AC adaptor input alone.

The small NP-FH50 battery is only 900mAh compared to 1650mAh for the A350's NP-FM500H. There is no percentage charge display, just a normal graphic indicator.

Sony supply comprehensive literature with the camera. There is a proper printed manual, a system brochure and a lens brochure, a

the A350, with lower noise (easy), better dynamic range (difficult), better sharpness (difficult)?

There may be some very small differences present between my A350 and the A380, but they are not fundamental. They are the kind of differences you can also find between two identical DSLRs with different serial numbers. The A380 is a little more generous with exposure and also has a more realistic preview on the camera LCD in terms of colour balance. It's a bit bright and I ended up reducing exposures when no compensation was needed.

As far as I can see, the output across the ISO range with and without

NR (high ISO and long exposure) and with various DRO settings and JPEG adjustments is identical. There is no visible improvement and the A380 (at least) appears to use exactly the same sensor and in-camera processing as the A350.

Value for money

I mentioned the price at the start of this review. You can get a Canon EOS 500D or a Nikon D5000 with a more solidly built 18-55mm image stabilised lens for exactly the same £600 as the A380 with lightweight SAM 18-55mm. Those cameras both offer off-sensor live

view, both have HD video filming, and the Nikon has a better articulated rear screen (Canon's is just a normal plain fixed screen).

They also both feel far more substantial and have more visible control functions. Maybe this is what Sony wanted to avoid, and the new models will capture technophobe upgraders.

Even so, I feel I have just bought a £399 kit for £599 and it's not a good feeling. I bought an A350 body for £300 in March and that was a real bargain. I bought a Nikon D5000 kit for £630 in May and felt it was good value for the new experience of HD video.

Maybe the price will fall rapidly

but right now the A200, A300 and A350 are better buys for anyone already owning Alpha gear (same CF cards, same battery, charger etc). That's the bottom line from the enthusiast/owner point of view. No doubt Sony's market research tells them the real potential lies with those new to DSLRs.

The 18-55mm lens is only a let-down at wide angles, wide open. The reduction of colour fringing in JPEGs makes up for that. SAM is neither better nor worse than in-body drive.

We look forward to whatever new models may appear in 2009 at Alpha 700 or higher level!



School cricket match at 55mm on the SAM 18-55mm lens, 1/320th at f8 at ISO 200. Pulling the white exposure in proved difficult without darkening the overall scene – in the original the sky is almost plain white and the cricketers are at least one stop overexposed. Below, at 220dpi (a typical scale for the largest good quality inkjet print) the Alpha 380 image shows excellent detail. The strength of the new 18-55mm is at the long end, 35-55mm. It also has very low chromatic aberration.








Extremes on the 18-55mm – and flash

In theory, stopping down to f22 on 14.2 megapixels means a soft image due to diffraction. In practice (above) the 18-55mm shows minimal pixel level detail loss even at f22 and 18mm. Below, the close-up capability of the 18-55mm is exceptional, producing a scale 10% larger than the Nikon 18-55mm which already has a reputation for 'macro'. The high-raised flash, plus the lack of a lens hood, mean that no shadow is cast on the subject even at the minimum focus.



New Alpha model specifications

Key features	A230	A330	A380
Image			
Effective Megapixels	Approx. 10.2	Approx. 10.2	Approx. 14.2
Lens compatibility	Sony α lens, Minolta and Konica Minolta AF lens	Sony α lens, Minolta and Konica Minolta AF lens	Sony α lens, Minolta and Konica Minolta AF lens
Image sensor	APS-C type CCD	APS-C type CCD	APS-C type CCD
Processor	BIONZ	BIONZ	BIONZ
Maximum ISO Sensitivity	3200	3200	3200
Image Quality Modes	Jpeg (fine, standard), RAW, RAW + Jpeg	Jpeg (fine, standard), RAW, RAW + Jpeg	Jpeg (fine, standard), RAW, RAW + Jpeg
HDMI connector and Bravia Sync	Yes (HDMI cable optional)	Yes (HDMI cable optional)	Yes (HDMI cable optional)
Image Size: 3:2 (pixels)	L 3872 x 2592 / M 2896 x 1936 / S 1920 x 1280	L 3872 x 2592 / M 2896 x 1936 / S 1920 x 1280	L 4592 x 3056 / M 3408 x 2272 / S 2288 x 1520
Viewfinder Type	Fixed eye-level, penta-Dach-mirror	Fixed eye-level, penta-Dach-mirror	Fixed eye-level, penta-Dach-mirror
LCD	2.7-inch type (230,400 dots)	2.7-inch type tilting screen (230,400 dots)	2.7-inch type tilting screen (230,400 dots)
Quick AF Live View	-	YES	YES
SteadyShot Inside	YES	YES	YES
Anti-dust System	Coating on low pass filter, plus image-sensor shift	Coating on low pass filter, plus image-sensor shift	Coating on low pass filter, plus image-sensor shift
Focus Modes	4	4	4
Autofocus	TTL phase detection system; CCD line sensors	TTL phase detection system; CCD line sensors	TTL phase detection system; CCD line sensors
Focus Points	Centre-cross 9	Centre-cross 9	Centre-cross 9
Exposure Modes	5	5	5
Exposure Metering Modes	Multi-segment, Centre-weighted, Spot	Multi-segment, Centre-weighted, Spot	Multi-segment, Centre-weighted, Spot
Exposure Metering Sensor	40-segment honeycomb-pattern SPC	40-segment honeycomb-pattern SPC	40-segment honeycomb-pattern SPC
Scene Selection	6	6	6
Creative Style Settings	7	7	7
Shutter Speed	1/4000-30sec	1/4000-30sec	1/4000-30sec
Exposure Bracketing	3 continuous exposures, in 0.3 or 0.7 EV steps	3 continuous exposures, in 0.3 or 0.7 EV steps	3 continuous exposures, in 0.3 or 0.7 EV steps
White Balance Settings	Auto / 6 presets / Custom WB	Auto / 6 presets / Custom WB	Auto / 6 presets / Custom WB
Continuous Advance Shooting	Up to 2.5 fps	Up to 2.5 fps with viewfinder	Up to 2.5 fps with viewfinder
Approx. no. of shots *	Approx. 510 shots	Approx. 510 shots (with viewfinder)	Approx. 500 shots (with viewfinder)
Built-in Flash	Auto pop-up – GN 10 at ISO 100 coverage up to 18mm	Auto pop-up – GN 10 at ISO 100 coverage up to 18mm	Auto pop-up – GN 10 at ISO 100 coverage up to 18mm
Flash Modes	Auto, Fill-flash, Rear sync, Slow sync, Red-eye reduction, Hi-speed sync **, Wireless **	Auto, Fill-flash, Rear sync, Slow sync, Red-eye reduction, Hi-speed sync **, Wireless **	Auto, Fill-flash, Rear sync, Slow sync, Red-eye reduction, Hi-speed sync **, Wireless **
Media	Memory Stick PRO Duo / PRO-HG Duo / PRO-HG Duo HX / SD memory card / SDHC memory card	Memory Stick PRO Duo / PRO-HG Duo / PRO-HG Duo HX / SD memory card / SDHC memory card	Memory Stick PRO Duo / PRO-HG Duo / PRO-HG Duo HX / SD memory card / SDHC memory card
Dimensions (W x H x D)	Approx. 128 x 97 x 67.5mm	Approx. 128 x 97 x 71.4mm	Approx. 128 x 97 x 71.4mm
Weight ***	Approx. 450g	Approx. 490g	Approx. 490g

* The measurement method is based on the CIPA standard (CIPA: Camera & Imaging Product A.

** With optional accessory flash by Sony

*** Without batteries, memory card or accessories

α gallery

The theme of our opening spread is simply nature in scale and in setting, creatures of different sizes in their environment. Below are two mating pairs (one more welcome than the other, even if flies are essential to the survival of the planet!). Jozef Poortmans used a Dynax 7D with 100mm Cosina macro at f8, ISO 1400, 1/125th. Carl McKie used an A700 with 400mm f4.5 for his avocets mating, with a movement-freezing 1/1250th at f5.6, ISO 200. See www.wildaboutphotography.co.uk. On the facing page are two very different types of grassland with tree and denizen. Top, a wonderful meadow with apple tree caught by Markus Spring – a 30-year-old stallion in retirement, in a traditional orchard in Bayerisch Gmain, Germany. Alpha 700, 70-300mm G SSM, ISO 200, 1/125 at full aperture and 300mm. Bottom, cheetab in Tarangire National Park, Tanzania, by Winston Mitchell. Alpha 700, 100-400mm Minolta APO lens at 400mm, 1/320th at f6.3, ISO 800.





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You may also put caption, website, etc information in a separate text document attachment or in the body of your email.

The pictures must have been taken on Minolta, Konica Minolta, Sony or Sony Alpha equipment. Scans from slides, negatives or prints are accepted and full details must be provided of equipment used. EXIF data will be used to confirm the origin of digital entries.

Send by email to: **gallery@photoclubalpha.com**

You may also send by post on CD. CDs or DVDs must be universal (Mac or PC) and always 'finished' never left open for another writing session. Please do not send memory cards. TIFFs may be used on CDs only, not by email— no layers, no 16-bit please. Send to :

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Two superb sunset and sunrise scenes remind us that the solstice is coming in a few weeks, and generally provides the best sunsets round the world as well as a convenient time to look for both sunset and sunrise images. Sony is planning a promotional campaign, based around football which they are making a major focus of their brand identity. See <http://www.sony.co.uk/twilightfootball> for more information. Above, midwinter sunset of the River Stinchar, Ballantrae, Scotland captured in a DRO+3 Alpha 700 panorama by Allan McKeown. Below, Brazilian fishermen on a cold morning, by Marcello Sokal. Alpha 100, 70-210mm f4 Minolta AF lens, ISO 200, 1/500th at f13 set to 210mm.





Two pictures selected purely for their vivid colour. Above: the famous Church Of The Good Shepherd, located on the shores of Lake Tekapo, New Zealand. Alex Ting who shot this is from Riccarton, NZ, a namesake of a Scottish Borders village – and the scene could almost be in Scotland, as with so many NZ landscapes and buildings. He used an Alpha 100 with 17-35mm f2.8-4 Konica Minolta lens set to 17mm, ISO 100, 1/400th at f10. Below is a study of a summer lavender bed at Highdown Gardens, Worthing, West Sussex, taken by Tony Jones. He also used an Alpha 100 fitted with a Sigma 55-200mm zoom, set to 150mm. He used ISO 400, resulting in an exposure of 1/320th at f7.1. The vivid colours produced by the Alpha 100 make a camera which retains loyalty three years after its launch.



Do you mind if I take you

Approaching people you would like to photograph can be as simple as asking “Would you mind” - but in today’s world, it is not always that straightforward. It is human nature to be a little wary about approaching strangers and dependent on circumstances, you may need to consider the sensitivity of a given situation and sometimes your safety. While many people are happy to be photographed, some may have reasons why they don’t want to be “caught on film”.

Today, there are also moral, ethical and religious considerations, which it would be foolish to ignore. As a child I was regularly photographed walking along the promenade at Skegness. “Hello” or “Look here” shouted the opportunist photographer as the shutters opened and closed. My aunt was given a ticket, with a promise of a fabulous holiday keepsake, and we would duly return the following day to look for our photo on the photo-board by the pier wall: and sometimes she would buy one.

I recently experienced a similar event in Mexico. The difference was that the opportunist had been taking photographs of school children as they were going in to school, printing them and returning with photos pinned on a board for the mothers to view and buy when they collected their children. Maybe they were both trying to make a buck, but in some countries this would not be acceptable behaviour.

An experience I had in Israel, during the seventies, made me aware that not everyone wanted to be photographed. A war worn Arab woman, carrying an armful of vegetables across a bomb crater at sunset, dropped her shopping, shielded her face and ran from me, screaming abuse, as I pointed the camera at her. I really was not trying to steal her soul but she thought otherwise.

One sunny Saturday afternoon walking along a very busy Portobello Road in London, I suddenly found myself sitting on the roadside. It was a domino effect. A couple of Dutch tourists were shooting video of the market scenes, when a very large and ugly looking guy threw his weight behind a punch aimed directly at the camera. The force of the punch smashed the viewing lens in to the cameraman’s eye knocking him backwards in to the crowd and along with several other people (including

Peter Fry overcame worries about approaching strangers on a Caribbean cruise – armed with a Sony Cybershot DSC-F828, he captured tourist poses and ‘real life’ alike



Above and below – buskers, Jamaica. These guys were looking for donations and just as happy to pose for a photograph as to keep playing. The banjo player had a sign offering photos for a dollar.



... picture?



Above – Bahamian lady. This was a case of asking, and being allowed to take a photograph. Below – Costa Rican weaver turning coconut palm leaves into bats. A tourist photo call. A wide aperture enabled focus on the bats, with the weaver softened.



me) to the ground. One view maybe that this unprovoked attack was a reaction, an unexplainable explosion of rage. Another maybe that this villain, drug dealer, illegal immigrant, protected witness, undercover agent or person fearful of soul stealers was provoked. You decide...

Earlier I mentioned my visit to Honduras, this was part of a bigger trip around the Western Caribbean and an ideal photographic opportunity. From the outset, I decided to make the most of this vacation by stepping out of my normal comfort zone of scenery, shapes and colours and adding people to my subject list.

I did have some rather strange and ingenious expectations of capturing people in traditional dress, in their natural habitat going about their daily lives, before I started my journey. Although, as it turned out, I did meet up with lots of locals in traditional dress, singing traditional songs on traditional quaysides with their traditional collection jars. They quickly became known as the "Folklores".

I also met a lot of locals, in their local habitat going about their normal business but they were not the same as the Folklores. And here was my dilemma, how do approach people to have their photograph taken when they are just going about their daily lives?

Firstly, before you open your mouth, you have to believe that you are doing this for the right reasons. Either you are a professional photographer and your objectives are commercial or you are a budding photographer trying to be creative and looking for recognition or you are a holiday snapper. In the first two cases you are after a reward of some kind and it is not unreasonable to share your potential reward with your subject. In the later case of the holiday snapper, you should get your subjects services for free or by donation.

I decided that I fell in to the middle category of budding photographer and while I would be a friendly opportunist, I would also be prepared to pay for a shot I wanted.

Sailing around the islands and countries of the Western Caribbean I met a lot of photographically, interesting people. I also experienced some very interesting and very different attitudes to being photographed.

Nassau, Bahamas, we watched a state funeral pass by at speed. If I had been more prepared I might have captured the dignitaries travelling in a school bus but even the flag draped coffin being transported by a black jeep and trailer went by too quickly. I did capture some wood carvers at work. They just got on

with their work as lots of cameras clicked away. A young steel drummer was more enterprising and had put up a sign saying, "photographs \$1". The sign was taped on his steel drum next to a bucket marked "TIPS". As it turned out it was not a great photo, but hey, I paid my dues.

One photo I am very proud of came about by introducing our selves to some old folk sitting on a park bench. I had been taking some long distance shots of these local characters sitting on a park bench, but knew if I wanted a good shot I would have to get up close: one of the disadvantages of my Sony DSC-F828. Once we started talking, it turned out that the subject's friend had spent time in Scotland (not far from where I live). It was useful being with my wife who kept the conversation going while I took some photos of this union. I did ask "would you mind if I took some photographs of you" before I held up the camera. They were only too pleased to be photographed. The only downside of this encounter was time. You don't get long to look around a town on a cruise and life stories take time!

Ocho Rios, Jamaica, was a very different experience. It was also very different from the pictures I had seen of the rather grand hotels and sandy beaches. I understand they do exist but not in Ocho Rios proper. Here I did go out on a limb. Everyone was after your dollar and although there were plenty of tourist police on the route in to town from the docks, it was not clear until our return to the ship what they were doing. Meantime, we had been "picked up" by a non-official guide and taken to one of the many markets full of tourist tat. Friends and relations of our guides ran most of these market stalls.

We were joined by another unofficial guide and good friend of guide number one. Our programme then started to get interesting. We were taken to an old rundown colonial hotel, we had plant life and details about the town explained to us as we walked along – not fully realising we were moving further out of town and in to some fairly desperate accommodation. I continued to take photographs of backyards, shanty dwellings and our guide's friends. There were eyes everywhere. If I snapped someone surreptitiously I was spotted and told to pay the subject. I did use my situation and say that I was with Brian our official unofficial guide and therefore under his protection from the many approaching scammers. Brian always walked ahead of us (like he didn't know us) and often disappeared at the sight of a police car.

Apparently Brian's uncle was





in the police and that he should be working at the building site today and would get told off if he was spotted. Although I was aware that we were being scammed, I didn't feel threatened in any way until we reached the end of our tour; when we were cornered. This tour now cost me \$40 to escape but I did get to places not marked on the tourist map.

Later in the day, in a different part of town, I noticed a group of white shirted men playing dominoes inside a garden rotunda. It turned out that they were off duty policemen and in return for my appreciation of their gamesmanship I was rewarded with a photo opportunity. On this occasion I had time to talk and ask questions – it makes so much difference to your comfort levels.

The answer is yes. I did also take some shots of the dockside “folklores” playing their worn out guitars and box drums. Actually it was quite a cool subject and the photos turned out quite well.

Cartagena, Colombia. After our experience in Jamaica we opted not stray far from the beaten track. As we walked around town I kept my shots to architecture and the flora and fauna. Until we reached the centre of town, where the traders and local cultures were far too interesting not to capture on film. These shots included photos of flower sellers at work, various fruit barrows being wheeled along the street and a line of male street typists providing secretarial services to the public.

I got some great shots and felt very comfortable with my camera in this town. Maybe because we were in a real town or maybe the people of Cartagena just like having their photograph taken – I don't know. What I do know is that in several cases it was difficult to stop them posing and in one case I didn't.

So, would you mind if I took your photograph? My cruise experience has taught me that in my “Budding Photographer” rôle you have to be creative. Not only in your choice of subject but also in the art of approaching people. While there are many similar stories I could tell, I have concluded that it all a matter of circumstance and opportunity. How much do you want that shot, that close up? What are you prepared to negotiate? Time? Money? Effort?

Most people are really happy to pose for a photograph, even without a financial incentive. But for that shot of a lifetime, capturing that unique moment of madness or joy, you and your camera must be invisible. Now there's another story.



Facing page: Colombian street market fruit vendor, and Roatan dance show performer. Both happily posed for shots when asked. Top: a real photo scoop. Off duty police playing dominoes, Jamaica. They were happy to chat and allow a photo. Above: a genuine candid shot of US military having a drink off duty, Key West. Right: another candid, this time of the cruise ship staff!



Patterns in the sand

Our fondness for sand stretches back to our childhood, but as we head to the beaches for family holidays this Summer, consider the great opportunities sand offers for some serious photography. The coast is one of the best places where family commitments and photography can happily co-exist.

Sand has several attributes and characteristics that can contribute to image construction – form, colour, texture and pattern. It is easy to overlook the variation in colour that exists in sands around our coasts, from near white to deep reddish shades and even black. The colour is determined by the nature of the rocks (or sea shells) from which the sand has formed. The prevailing light further influences the colour, particularly around dawn and sunset when warm light enriches the natural colour while the low angle of light emphasises surface texture.

In order to get surfaces free of footprints, it is best to photograph on a falling tide. If this is in early morning then so much the better, as visitors and dog walkers will not have arrived. It pays not to be too impetuous – treat sand as you would freshly fallen snow. There is nothing more frustrating than finding you have left your own footprints in an area you later decide to photograph. Tread cautiously, look around, and make careful assessments before proceeding.

A further advantage of a falling tide is that wet sand provides a much more reflective surface than dry sand and will pick up good reflections from an interesting sky. On beaches composed of differently coloured grains, an ebbing tide can leave fascinating patterns as the different densities of grains are moved differently by the water. Most impressive is where black particles are mixed with whitish ones – common on many Hebridean islands. On such beaches, when water trickles or flows from residual pools, the particles move at different rates and some creative images can be made by using slowish shutter speeds such as 1/4 to 1/15 of a second.

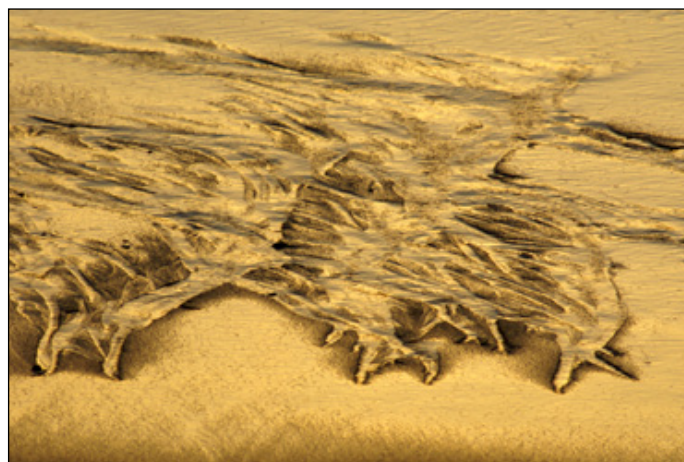
Compared with rocky shores, sandy beaches are constantly changing, even with each successive tide, although more pronounced changes will occur after heavy seas and stormy weather. So even working the same beach day after day will produce fresh opportunities.

Sand makes a lovely, simple,

Duncan McEwan points you at a great subject for warm days as the evenings begin to draw in and dawn becomes less anti-social – the textures of the coastline.



Above: the mixture of coloured grains creates a fascinating tree-like pattern. Alpha 100, Minolta 24-105mm D lens. 1/40 @ f20. ISO 200. Facing page: Sand Patterns at Tolsta, Lewis – a peaty stream flowing across the beach. Alpha 100m, Sony DT 16-80mm ZA lens. 1/200 @ f11. ISO 200. Polariser. Below: sand etched by draining sea water is given a strong 3-dimensional quality by the low angle of evening sun. Alpha 100, Minolta 100-300mm Apo D at 250mm. 1/250 @ f16. ISO 200.



textured background for items such as seaweed, shells, jellyfish, driftwood and other debris washed up by the sea. Sometimes the scene may look rather chaotic and cluttered but time spent looking for simple compositions will prove rewarding. While trying to tidy a scene by removing distracting elements is possible, it is usually best avoided as any disturbance of the sand could look worse than leaving the offending material in place. Cloning out in *Photoshop* might be a better option.

Sand dunes hold a lot of interest and while the ultimate dune experience is to be found in the desert regions of the world, such as Namibia, dunes are quite common in certain parts of the British coastline. Their 3-D form is emphasised by strong directional lighting and the marram grass that colonises them can be very attractive particularly when it has seed heads. Dune systems are much more fragile than sandy beaches which are washed twice a day by the tides. Too much human activity on dunes can cause erosion, so treat them with respect. In dry weather, steep sided dunes often have interesting patterns where dry sand has been flowing in rivulets down the surface.

Perhaps the most common and eye-catching patterns found on the beach are the ripples left by the waves and retreating tide – furrows of sand like a ploughed field but with lines that may be straight or curved, continuous or discontinuous. Water often remains trapped between these ripples and if the viewing angle is carefully chosen, the water will pick up reflections of the sky. With a blue sky, the water will be blue, giving a strong colour contrast to the warm colour of the sand. Another intriguing detail is provided by worm casts, but being small in size, a macro lens will be necessary to make a frame-filling image.

While sand is a great subject for photography, sand and photographic equipment don't mix so well, particularly when there are strong winds. When sand blows, the worst effect is generally within a foot or so of the surface so keeping bags

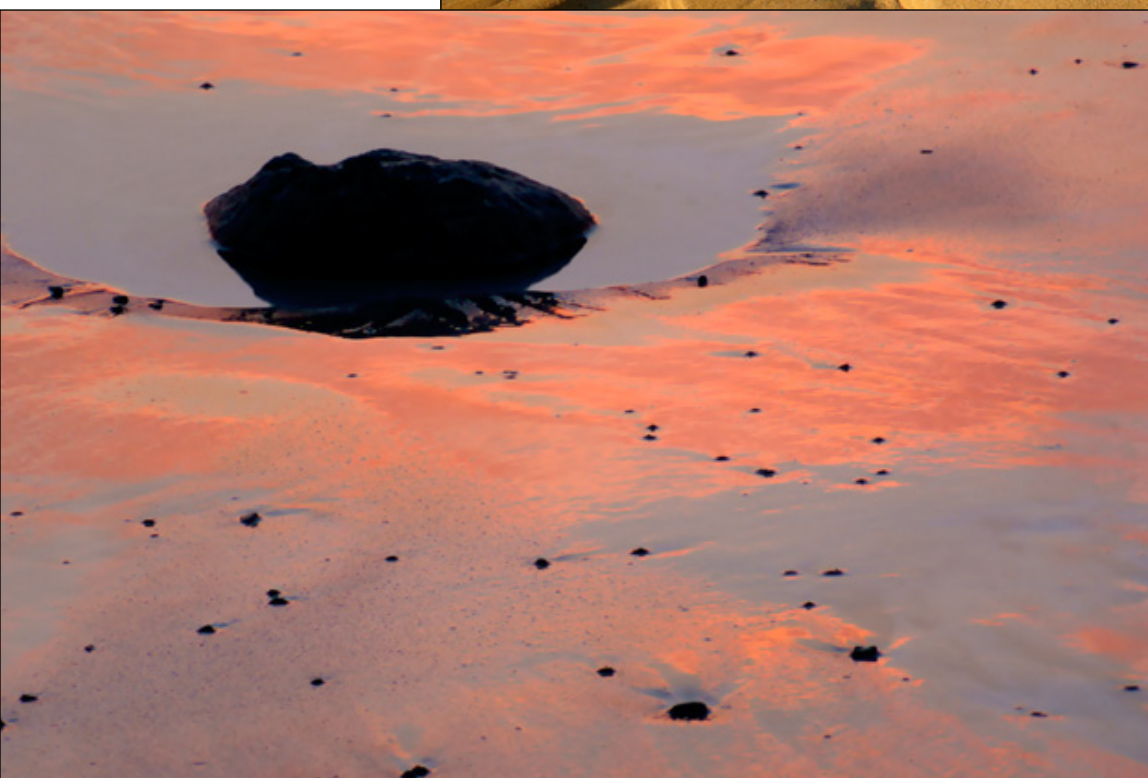
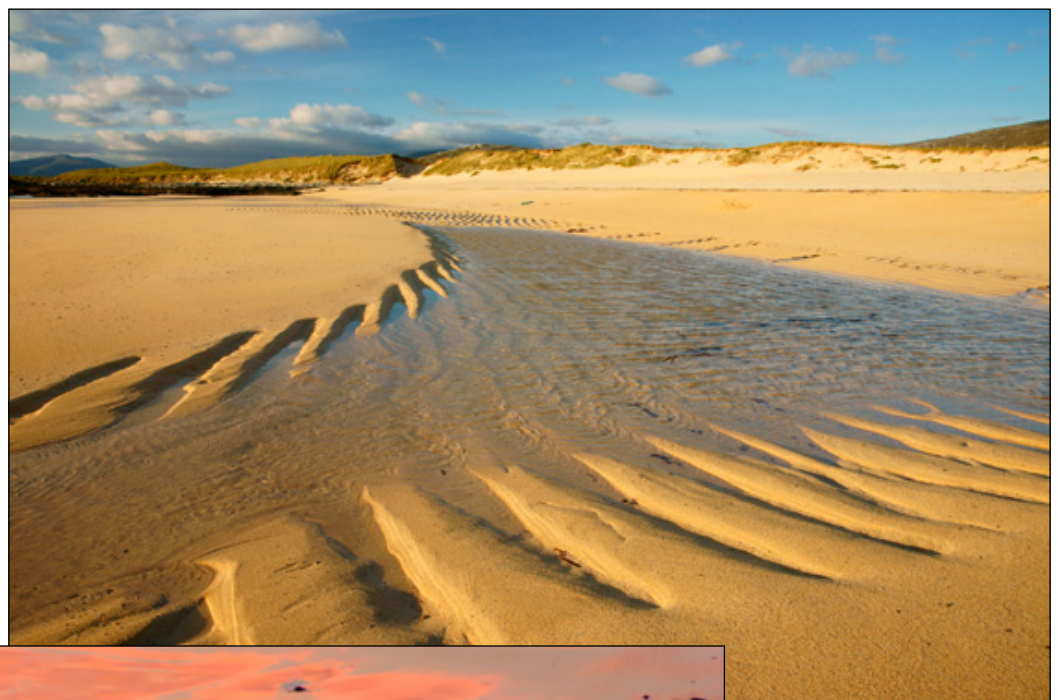




at a higher level is advised. Most backpacks have the disadvantage of having to be placed on the ground to gain access to equipment whereas a traditional shoulder or slingshot bag is a much better option as it is possible to 'work out of the bag'. A photographic type waistcoat has similar advantages. Placing your bag on a rock or hanging it on an extended tripod, is a wise precaution. Wet sand may seem less of a problem but it will adhere to anything laid on it and could cause problems later on.

There are many ways to enjoy sand – try viewing it with an artistic eye. 📷

Top: Luskentyre Sands at Ebb Tide. The different depths of water overlying the sand create variation in colour. Alpha 900, Sony 70-400mm SSM G lens (400mm). 1/60 @ f16. ISO 200. Polariser. Left: Sea Shells on Beach. A busy composition, but just as found, no rearrangement was attempted. Alpha 900, Minolta 100mm f2.8 macro lens. 1/80 @ f20. ISO 200.



Top: Painting in the Sand. At the apex of each peak is a small pebble which has deflected the dark grains of sand differently from the pale grains. (Taken looking from the seaward side). Alpha 100, Sony DT 16-80mm ZA lens. 1/80 @ f10. ISO 100.

Above: Sands at Scarista, Harris. Sand has been sculptured by sea water escaping from a pool left high on the beach by the receding tide. Alpha 900, 24-70mm f2.8 CZ SSM lens. 1/20 @ f18. ISO 200.

Left: Wet Sand Reflection. A low viewing angle was adopted to pick up reflections from a sunset sky. Alpha 100, Minolta 100-300mm Apo lens at 180mm. 1/25 @ f25. ISO 200.

All photographs by Duncan I. McEwan, Photoworld Club Scottish Region organiser & lecturer.

Straight shooting Sigma

The arrival of Hyper Sonic Motor focusing from Sigma in the Alpha mount has been long awaited – they first indicated that it could happen back in 2006, then at photokina 2008 confirmed the roll-out of their own version of SSM.

No other independent lens maker has ever provided in-lens focusing for the Minolta AF mount, though it looks as if the micro-motor SAM (Smooth Autofocus Motor) found in the new budget priced DT lenses could be similar to the motors Tamron is now fitting for Nikon and Canon designs.

I was not able to obtain a Sigma 10-20mm $f3.5$ in Alpha mount, and tested this in Nikon fit on the 12 megapixel sensor of the Nikon D5000. This is comparable to the Alpha 700 and allows good enough assessment of the optical performance.

I also was able to try the other two lenses in more than one mount. I've looked at the 70-200mm in both Nikon and Alpha fit, and the 18-250mm in Canon and Alpha. Both these are HSM models in all mounts.

Owners who can afford Sony SSM lenses, especially a mixture of classics like the 70-200mm Minolta design and the latest CZ 24-70mm, will know that SSM is not necessarily a faster focusing system than body-driven 'screw focus'. While the 24-70mm CZ is very fast, the 70-200mm APO is leisurely. SSM improves tracking by making very fine adjustments continuously, but it will not snap from close-up to landscape in the blink of an eye.

Sigma's HSM is also not one single technology. The HSM in the 18-250mm zoom is a relatively slow and audible type, moving an external focus ring which can not be over-ridden when AF is switched on. The version in the 70-200mm is extremely fast and quiet, operating an internal focus mechanism which can be over-ridden just by turning the external control at any time. This is what Minolta and Sony have called DMF (direct manual focus) and other makers call 'full time manual focus'.

So, as more HSM Sigma lenses appear you will find that each has its own variation on the Hyper Sonic Motor.

The 70-200mm $f2.8$

There have been four versions of the 70-200mm apochromatic fast tele from Sigma, the original EX, then EX Macro, followed by

David Kilpatrick looks at three new Sigma lenses – the 18-250mm $f3.5-6.4$ which has in-lens stabilisation even for Alpha, the 70-200mm $f2.8$ and converter with HSM focusing, and the fast 10-20mm $f3.5$ ultrawide zoom.



digitally optimised EX DG Macro, and finally EX DG Macro II HSM.

The macro (or close-up) function is improved with focusing down to just 1 metre, and an image scale of 1:3.8. Though it's only 20cm closer than



The Sigma 70-200mm $f2.8$ EX DG Macro II HSM is very close in size and weight to the Sony 70-200mm SSM, but finished in a matt ('Zen') black which fingermarks readily. Its unexpected strength lies in close-up work at 200mm – above, at full aperture and a moderate working distance; below, at $f5$ and the closest focus of 1 metre (Herb Robert or wild geranium).



the Sony 70-200mm and the image size is just a touch larger, at this range any difference is noticeable.

Where Sigma have excelled is in controlling the field flatness of this lens. All these fast 70-200mm designs tend to suffer from loss of sharpness to the edges and corners both at the long end of the range (200mm) and closest focus. The Minolta/Sony design when set to 1.2m and 200mm needs stopping down to $f11$ to get a sharp picture of a flat subject on a full frame camera.

The Sigma can be used wide open with some loss of outer field quality, but it's nothing like the falloff given by the Sony or indeed the similar Nikon lens. It is not quite as sharp centrally, but the resolution taken from corner to corner is more evenly tuned. At a setting like $f5.6$ it's a better lens for any kind of close studies.

It has pretty well controlled distortion, visible vignetting especially at 200mm and anything wider than $f8$, a trace of chromatic aberration and a slightly less perfect 'bokeh' than the Sony design.

What impressed me was the speed of the HSM focus. It's significantly faster than the Sony SSM, and can occasionally overshoot the target. There is no focus limiter, and with such rapid shifts of focus one is needed. If you do miss getting a first-time autofocus lock, you may see the focus go past the



Below: the HSM focusing tracks a steadily moving subject like this silently – you are unaware of the focus changing. Contrast in a strongly backlit situation is good, and the 70-200mm resists flare well, aided by a deep lenshood.

The 2X converter shown fitted must be the new revision labelled for HSM in order to work. The cricket shot is taken wide open – at f5.6 – at maximum focal length. The detail is a 300dpi Alpha 900 file.



right setting so quickly you don't even see a sharp image by eye.

This rapid focus change means that conventional tele converters, including Sigma's own unless they are boxed and labelled as Sony (D) HSM Compatible, won't work. The point of focus does not dwell long enough for the camera to say yes.

I tested Sigma's latest 2X APO converter, and it doesn't slow the focus down much if at all, but it does something to prevent hunting or jittering. The results are surprisingly good, with less chromatic aberration than I found the Minolta 2X converter and 70-200mm combination produced, if rather lower overall contrast. While full aperture at 200mm without the converter shows strong vignetting, 400mm wide open ($f5.6$) with the converter offers very even illumination.

Overall, I feel the 70-200mm HSM Sigma is a very solidly made and optically well designed revision, at a price which makes me less worried about using it daily. After many years of resisting big apo lenses (I even bought and then sold an 80-200mm $f2.8$ back in the 1980s) I find myself with this one in my regular kit and I'm enjoying the results it can produce.

The 18-250mm OS

Why would a Sony user want a superzoom with built-in optical stabilisation, which is much bigger than the already excellent Sony 18-250mm, weighs more, and takes 72mm filters – as well as costing £560?

Easy – if that zoom happened to outperform the Sony, and every other similar zoom on the market, you want it. Especially if the performance was exceptional at the long end. Most such lenses are good at the short end and just seem to blow up the middle of the shot so it gets progressively softer.

The Optical Stabiliser is termed 'hybrid' by Sigma but that means nothing. You can either use the in-lens system, or the in-body SSS system, but not both together. You can also switch both off for tripod shots. If you do use both together (I have tested it) the results are normally much worse than a hand-held shot without either!

SSS we are all familiar with, you see the indicator, and you also see the effect of your shaky hand in a jerky finder image which is hard to compose. OS you will know if you have used Nikon or Canon, or many consumer digicams. The in-lens system floats the image to a stable position and keeps it there, giving you a very steady frame to compose.

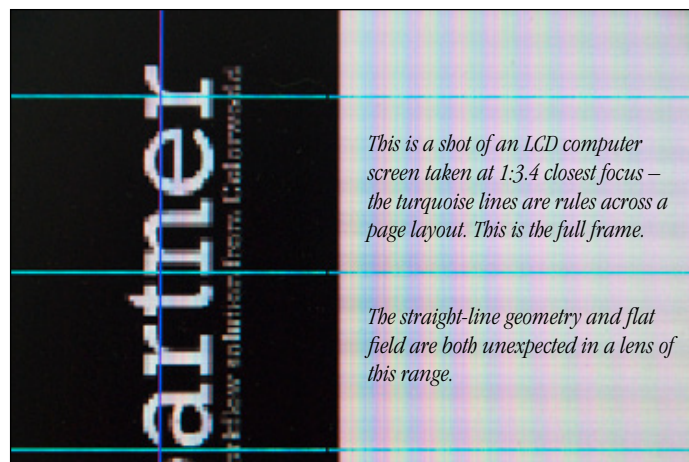
The downside is that if you move



Sigma 18-250 mounted on Alpha 700. Bottom of page – extended to 250mm.



Left, Sigma – right, Sony. Size matters?



This is a shot of an LCD computer screen taken at 1:3.4 closest focus – the turquoise lines are rules across a page layout. This is the full frame.

The straight-line geometry and flat field are both unexpected in a lens of this range.



the camera quickly to re-compose the shot, the image may briefly wander and take a quarter of a second or so to settle down. Also, if you pre-compose your shot by looking through the finder and then touch the shutter release to focus, the lens will have been locked in its 'rest' position and suddenly moves to a different alignment. The effect of this is like having your camera suddenly forced down at the nose, so you need to aim a bit higher to restore the original horizon level.

In-lens OS seems to work just as well as in-body SSS. I felt after some use that OS coped better with longer, swaying sort of shake

while SSS deals more effectively with higher frequencies. I liked the optical stability at 250mm but not much at 18mm. It works very well indeed on the Alpha 300/350 and 330/380 with Live View, which can be tricky to frame at 250mm.

As for results, the Sigma 18-250mm rewrites the book. It has hardly any distortion at 250mm, instead of the usual strong pincushion; it is critical sharp centrally wide open at 250mm, with no hint of the slightly 'dirty' overlay of aberrations present in the Sony 18-250mm at the long end. The close focus is superb, reaching 1:3.4 which is a significant gain over the 1:4 of previous designs. It also has a very flat field, and once again an impossibly accurate drawing with no visible distortion. It's no exaggeration to say that this lens could be used to copy postage stamps.

At the 18mm end, it shows less gain over other designs but that's because they are generally good enough in the wide to standard range. However, it again has low distortion and to this can be added very good illumination and corner sharpness.

Overall, the Sigma 18-250mm $f3.5-6.4$ DC OS emerges as the most professionally usable of all such superzooms including the designs from Canon and Nikon (which only go to 200mm anyway). Add to this the bonus of HSM focusing, not quite as slick as the 70-200mm version, and it seems set either to join our Sony example or replace it. We can't decide whether the stiffer zoom ring, larger size, heavier weight, and non-standard filter fit count too much against it. The Sony is such a small, sweet lens to use and optically it is good enough. As Sigma make more and better lenses in Alpha fit, especially with HSM focusing, our system is beginning to look like a Sigma outfit with Sony bodies.

Faster 10-20mm

So, to the final lens, the new constant $f3.5$ 10-20mm EX DC which is once again an HSM model with a pretty high price – in the mid-£600 bracket. The older $f4-5.6$ Alpha screw focus model will continue to be available at a much lower price.

Though I have only tested this lens on a Nikon body, you will be relieved to know that it's not about to oust our Sony 11-18mm $f4-5.6$ from the cupboard. It may have a longer range and be faster, but it's not as sharp towards the extreme corners, especially when used wide open.

Like the 10-24mm $f3.5-4.5$ Tamron which I also tested on Nikon, the brighter focusing image is achieved at the expense



of corner sharpness and the lens must be stopped down to around f8 to f11 for really good results. This also applies to the 11-18mm Sony, but once all the lenses are at f11 there's no clear winner.

Examining the image, I felt that the 10-20mm Sigma is really designed for the Canon 1.6X sensor rather than the Sony/Nikon 1.5X sensor. It's even better when used on a Sigma DSLR with a 1.7X sensor – the soft corners are eliminated by being cropped off. The geometry of the lens is very good across the full range from 10 to 20mm.

The HSM focusing is wonderful and seems to give much finer settings with wide-angle lenses than screw focus. The lens itself is superbly built, it's not as prone to flare as the older design, it deserves the EX label but you pay highly for a low light capability with just the centre really sharp.

I don't think it is worth twice as much as any of the older alternatives unless you really want HSM focusing, in which case it would make a great companion to the 18-250mm.

The 10mm fisheye

Fianlly, club member Daniel Oi has been having fun with an APS-C full frame fisheye, the new Sigma 10mm f2.8 EX DC. I have to say it's much like other fisheyes! Corner sharpness is irrelevant because of the things which happen to detail in the corners anyway. Even exposure is difficult over a 180° angle, and only a few subjects work really well. I carry a 16mm full frame fisheye with my A900 but only use it once or twice a month when something just right comes up.

Daniel has produce a multi-shot panorama using the 10mm, showing Glasgow University undercroft arches. As with his other panoramic and 360° assemblies, it proves that these lenses have applied uses as well as purely creative ones.



10mm two very different ways: above, a tiny art gallery created in an old public WC building, photographed by David Kilpatrick using the 10-20mm f3.5 zoom at 10mm, f16, tripod. Below, Glasgow University undercroft photographed by Daniel Oi using the 10mm f2.8 Sigma DC fisheye – multiple shots stitched together for a 'more than 180°' composition.



Alpha finds its level

Adrian Paul at the Photostore sent some sample spirit levels up to Kelso for testing. There was one clear winner – a well made acrylic block with three levels, allowing alignment of the camera in either vertical or horizontal position.

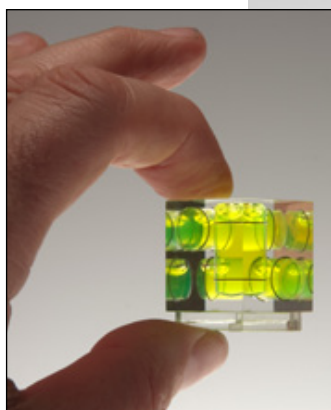
These levels use a wide radius, meaning that the bubble will only stay central when the camera really is horizontal. Some of the cheaper levels, and a couple of proprietary ones we have for standard hot-shoes, have such a tight radius that you can tilt the camera a long way before the bubble starts to move.

This very accurate 3-way level is also well made and sealed. One of the other samples sent could not be tested as the crudely glued block had leaked the fluorescein fluid.

The spirit level costs only £12.49 including VAT and postage (UK/Europe) or postage only (VAT free export to the rest of the world).

It fits the Sony/Minolta hot shoe only and can not be used on a standard shoe. The Sony shoe is perfectly parallel to the lens axis. This is not always the case with flash shoes. The shoe of the Nikon F5 standard prism, for example, has a slight downwards tilt to compensate for positioning the flash very high above the axis. It can not be used to mount a spirit level. All the Sony and Minolta cameras we were able to check have a shoe

The Photostore has sourced a spirit level which fits the Sony/Minolta Alpha flash shoe – and with three accurate axes to work from, perfect line-up is easy to achieve



which is straight and flat, meaning that the level will be accurate.

To order a 3-Way Spirit Level, go to www.photostore-uk.com and visit Adrian's 'Minolta Mania' eBay shop (trader name minolta-mania) – or call Adrian on 01132 448 664 with credit card ready.

Check the website, they have loads of accessories for sale and can order almost anything for you.



Holding the A380 over a high wall it was very difficult to line up on screen, by eye. The spirit level helped get things straight, right hand shot.



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Vital parts released

A long-demanded 1.15X eyepiece magnifier – compatible with all APS-C format Sony Alpha DSLRs – is just one of a rollout of new minor accessories for the system. The Magnifying Eyepiece FDA-ME1AM is designed to fit the A700, A380, A330, A230, A350, A300 and A200 and should also be fully compatible with A100, Konica Minolta 7D and 5D.

To date, many Sony users have been using eyepiece magnifiers from other makes. Nikon, Sony and Pentax models can all be made to fit. Most have a higher magnification than the Sony offering (the range is between 1.17X and 1.2X). Olympus's 1.2X ME-1 is not a perfect fit, while the Pentax O-ME53 allows the eye start sensors to function normally and offers 1.18X



Viewfinder magnifier

The new Sony magnifier FDA-ME1AM is equally compact and will offer better compatibility with the A700 as well as a good optical match to the Sony ocular. These magnifiers are NOT the same type of device as the FDA-M1AM which is a macro magnifier for focusing. What they do is enlarge the screen view, especially for non-spectacle-wearers, so the viewfinder appears larger.



LCD screen protectors

For the rear screens of cameras, there are now hard covers for all models. These are clip-in rigid protectors, and are coded PCK-LH. A range of AR-coated adhesive soft protectors is also made coded PCK-LS. It's very important to order exactly the right

You may not find these new accessories in all dealers – the Photostore can obtain them for you. A brochure enclosed with the new Alphas lists them all.

model. For the A230, 330 and 380 a brand new LCD Hood is offered.

The SH-L1AM clips on like a rigid cover, and folds down flat to become a further protector. When flipped open, it provides a full size top 'canopy' and two partial wings to each side. The attachment method uses a clear hard plastic screen protector built in to the design.

Remote Commander

The new A230, 330 and 380 no longer have a remote release socket but they are compatible with the Remote Commander RMT-DSLR1 which is supplied with both the A700 and A900. No commander is thrown in with the new entry level Alpha kits, you must buy it as an accessory. It also functions as a playback controller when the cameras are connected by HDMI to a TV or monitor.



Protecting your kit

Minor new accessories include the Wrapping Cloth LCS-WR1AM in a choice of three colours. This is simply a microfibre cloth large enough to wrap up any camera or lens inside your bag, with a large keyring on one corner to anchor it to a strap if required.



A Lens Cap holder LCS-LC1AM is also made in three colours. This is a not-so-small pouch which can hold lens caps up to 77mm diameter, with an O-ring to slip it on to your camera strap. Sony marketing has failed to spot that it can also be used to hold a filter in its case, and it's probably of most interest for that function!



Right-hand strap

There is a new universal Hand Strap STP-HS1AM which is similar to older designs of right-hand strap used mainly with battery packs or vertical grips. This one is compatible with any model, with or without vertical grip, due to the extendible strap section. However, it occupies your tripod thread. The good news is that a second strap lug is provided, so that your neck strap can be attached simultaneously. The older leather 'Grip Belt' STP-GB1AM does not allow this.



Neck Straps

Sony now has an entire range of shoulder/neck camera straps. We can firmly recommend one type – the leather soft wide strap STR-SH1AM. Do not confuse this

with the hard narrow leather strap STP-SH2AM. The wide one is like the old Minolta Dynax wide leather straps and far more comfortable.

For uses of heavier kit, there is a Neoprene elastic neckstrap STP-SB2AM which comes highly recommended despite the price of £49.50 which is steep for a strap. It has quick adjustment and can be detached, forming a handstrap instead.

GPS Tracking

A new GPS tracking unit, GPS-CS3KA, replaces the earlier original Sony GPS tracker. It still does not have any connectivity to any DSLR, requires a PC-only program that will only embed data in JPEGs, and overall it's a crippled and makeshift answer to adding GPS location data to images.



Compact AC adaptor

Finally, there is a new AC Adaptor/Charger for the A230, 330 and 380 only – the AC-PW10AM. All earlier Alphas can be run from AC mains using the expensive intelligent twin charger unit, AC-V900AM, which accepts two batteries (NP-FM500H or NP-FM55H).

Though the AC adaptor for the new models is labelled Adaptor/Charger, there is no indication that the battery can be charged while in the camera. The Sony website says this adaptor is for ALL Alpha DSLRs and is a universal (use anywhere in the world) AC adaptor. If so, this lower cost option for running ALL Alphas is to be applauded and there does not seem to be any reason it won't fit – the power socket is exactly the same. The Sony leaflet says it is for 230/330/380 only.

The accessories brochure supplied with the new A230-380 models contains more detail. It also shows clearly that there are no vertical grips for these models, or other dedicated accessories.

– DK



IMPROVING YOUR LANDSCAPE PHOTOGRAPHY

with Colin Westgate
and Hugh Milsom

2 days, at Seaford, East Sussex

Wednesday/Thursday

30 September & 1 October 2009

Landscape photography is often thought to be straightforward and indeed, it is not difficult to obtain reasonable pictures. Frequently, however, landscape photographs are disappointing, perhaps because of unfavourable light, poor composition or unsatisfactory printing. With the right approach, such problems can be overcome and this comprehensive workshop will cover ways and means of improving your landscape pictures from the moment of taking to production of the final print.

The content will be a mixture of discussion, an appraisal of pictures from participants, and a field trip into the local area where there are interesting beaches and features such as the wonderful cliff scenery of the Seven Sisters. The In-depth discussion will cover the principles of landscape photography, use of colour or monochrome, digital or film. Topics such as the characteristics of different lenses, various filters, choice of subject matter, viewpoints, composition, principles of exposure, use of light and more will be included.

Vision and Interpretation are vital elements in the production of most successful landscape photographs. This includes 'pre visualisation' at the moment the picture is taken and post production prior to making the print. Both aspects will be covered, the latter using Photoshop procedures, which will be demonstrated using digital projection. A selection of images taken digitally on the workshop will be used, but if you are a film worker, you are invited to bring negatives or transparencies with you.

Both Colin Westgate and Hugh Milsom have many years of experience photographing in the landscape and both will demonstrate and discuss their individual approaches to the subject.

Price £125 (deposit £40). 8 places.

AUTUMN PICTURE FORUM

1 day, at Seaford, East Sussex

3 October 2009 (Saturday)

Due to the popularity of the Picture Forum days, we are now including two of these in the programme. The Autumn Forum will be run on similar lines to the Spring event, with the usual mix of mini presentations, a competition and a talk by a leading photographer. For this event, we are again fortunate to have joint speakers,

Quest Workshops 2009

Colin Westgate's QUEST workshops, sponsored by Photoworld, have moved to Coopers Cottage, 154 Coast Road, West Mersea, Mersea Island, Essex CO5 8NX.
Telephone 01206 384315. Mobile 07887 887101.

email questphoto@btinternet.com. See the new website

www.questphoto.co.uk for details of photo trips and the full 2009 programme.

Liz and Roger Scott, who will also judge the competition and entertain us with a talk on their different approaches to photography. Liz works mainly in the darkroom, whereas Roger's prints are digitally produced. Picture Forum is the opportunity for everyone to show their work, and we invite short presentations of up to 15 minutes (about 25 pictures). These can be with prints, slides, or digital files. The presentations occupy most of the day, and are a vital and enjoyable aspect of the programme. It is your chance to show your photography, so please bring a selection of your pictures. 'Slots' may, however, have to be restricted, according to numbers, so when booking, please say if you would like to give a presentation, and if so, your subject, and the medium you wish to use. If possible everyone will be accommodated, but in view of the increasing popularity of this feature, slots will be primarily allocated on a 'first come, first served basis', but also with regard to the need for a balanced programme. For practical reasons, the competition is open for prints only – not more than one per person. Liz and Roger will give a brief critique and appraisal on all entries. Prizes will be awarded for the best work, one to be chosen by our judges, and another by audience vote, plus runners up. This is always an interesting and exciting day of sharing pictures and experiences, where everyone can join in. Not to be missed!

Price £25 - includes buffet lunch & refreshments (but not bar drinks!). Payable in full on booking - not eligible for 'early booking discount arrangements

EXPLORING THE ABSTRACT

with Priscilla Thomas FRPS

1 day, at Seaford, East Sussex

October 4 2009 (Sunday)

If you enjoy colourful, intriguing and stimulating abstract images, but are uncertain how to go about making them, this workshop will explain and show you some of the possibilities. Using several 'photo stations' various methods will be demonstrated, after which everyone will be able to create

and photograph their own designs.

You will be limited only by your imagination! Every picture is unique and individual. Colour is recommended, film or digital, although you might even consider using some monochrome and hand tinting (or digitally enhancing) the resulting prints!

Priscilla Thomas is well known for her imaginative and artistic pictures, and in this workshop she will be sharing some of the techniques, including one or more new ones, that she employs when producing her creative and often evocative results. Back by popular demand, this workshop is your opportunity to make some truly unusual images!

Price £59 (deposit £20). 10 places

CAIRNGORMS and the GLENS

New Quest Destination!

12-18 October 2009

(Monday to Sunday) 6 nights

Discount available if combined with the Skye/Applecross trip – see below.

Our base will be at Beaulieu, which will be convenient for both locations. The photographic opportunities will include Loch Morlich and Glenmore Forest Park near Aviemore, and the wild Cairngorm mountains, plus the renowned north eastern Glens, including Affric and Cannich, where there should be a good display of autumn colour for us to enjoy. An additional optional feature of this trip will be a ride on the funicular railway, which travels to just below the summit of Cairngorm itself. Travel arrangements will be by air to Inverness and minibus thereafter.

**Turn this holiday into a fantastic 15-night trip and combine it with the Skye/Applecross trip and take a £110 discount – see below.*

Price £745 (deposit £100) single supplement £90 (8 places). May be booked with the Skye/Applecross trip (see below), for a combined price of £1590, thereby saving over £100 (excluding supplements). Price includes dinner, B&B and minibus travel but not lunch and is based on a shared twin room. A supplement is payable for single occupation.

ISLE OF SKYE and THE APPLECROSS PENINSULA

18-27 October 2009

(Saturday to Tuesday week).

9 nights – 6 Skye and 3 Lochcarron.

Guest House and Hotel based

Discount available if combined with Cairngorms & Glens trip – see below.

Year after year, this is one of our most popular destinations and it is not difficult to understand why, as the "Misty Isle" is surely one of the most beautiful parts of the United Kingdom, full of mood and mountains, rivers, bays and lochs. There is all that the landscape photographer could want - but Skye does not give it up that easily, as it is well known for the fickleness of its weather. But the weather makes the mood, and magic moments are never far away - if only the photographer is in the right place at the right time! Following the success of last year's extension to the dramatic Applecross peninsula, this has again been included in the schedule.

On Skye, we will, as usual, be based at The Skye Picture House, near Broadford, which is run by photographers Steve & Gill Terry. It is situated in a stunning location, at the edge of a loch, with superb views, especially for the morning sunrise. Otters and seals are often seen. A talk by photographer Ken Bryan, who lives on Skye, will be arranged if he is available. Our second location will be at Lochcarron, situated right by the Loch, with good access to Applecross.

**Turn this holiday into a fantastic 15-night trip and combine it with the Cairngorm and Glens trip above, and take a £110 discount – see below.*

Price £955 (deposit £200). Single supplement £125. Cost includes full board accommodation, with packed lunch on Skye, and half board at Lochcarron. The price is based on a shared twin room and a supplement is payable for single occupation. It also includes minibus travel on Skye and Applecross but not the cost of flights. May be booked with the Skye/Applecross trip (see below), for a combined price of £1590, thereby saving over £100 (excluding supplements).

AUTUMN IMPRESSIONS

with Colin Westgate

1 day, Sheffield Park, near Uckfield, E. Sussex

31 October 2009 (Saturday)

Learn how to produce beautiful impressionistic images of the superb autumn colour in the lovely Sheffield Park gardens, well known for the variety of its exotic trees and spectacular autumn colours. These are at their best at this time of the year and by the use of various diffusion methods, you are guaranteed to get some lovely pictures. After an initial discussion and demonstration of the techniques, the day will be spent photographing in the Park.

Price £58 (deposit £20).

10 places. Park entrance fees (where applicable) and refreshments on arrival included.

NORTH YORKSHIRE,

with JOE CORNISH

1-6 November 2009

(Sunday to Friday) 5 nights.

Joe Cornish is arguably Britain's finest contemporary landscape photographer and his use of light and composition, in conjunction with his total commitment, has resulted in a series of magnificent pictures of the landscape of the British Isles and elsewhere. His work is widely known and appears regularly in calendars and on cards and he is the author of several superb books on landscape photography.

The workshop will be based at the Lion Inn, Blakey Ridge, the highest inn on the North Yorkshire Moors. This remote and spectacular setting is an ideal location, and the open fires are something to enjoy in the evenings!

Daily field trips will be a feature of the workshop and thus some walking will be involved. You will need to be reasonably mobile for this. We will also be viewing and discussing Joe's pictures and an essential part of the workshop will include a constructive appraisal of pictures from participants. This really is a workshop not to be missed, as it represents a very rare opportunity to work with this top professional.

Joe regularly leads workshops in the UK and his enthusiasm and experience will guarantee an inspiring four days. Not to be missed, but book early, as places will be quickly filled.

Price £775 (deposit £100).

Single supplement £75. 10 places. Price includes B&B accommodation on a shared room basis, plus minibus travel to Yorkshire if required. It does not include evening and midday meals. A supplement is payable for single occupancy.

THE ARDECHE, FRANCE

New Quest destination!

in conjunction with

Experience Ardeche

15-22 November 2009

(Sunday to Sunday) 7 nights.

The Ardeche region is rich with photographic opportunities, with dramatic landscapes, large rivers, ancient forest and historical towns and villages. The variety of subject matter in the area will ensure a full and interesting week and of course we will enjoy the local ambience and French cuisine! We will be staying at the Belvedere Hotel, close by the famous Pont d'Arc, at the head of the Ardeche Gorge. Situated only 6km from the town of Vallon-Pont-d'Arc along the gorge road, Le Belvedere is a popular destination for the French tourists who prefer the tranquillity away from the hustle and bustle. A great opportunity to really enjoy this magical and welcoming part of France nestled right on the edge of the Réserve Naturelle. Quest has teamed up with Experience Ardeche for this event, a company specialising in activity holidays. Their knowledge of the area will guarantee us a full and interesting week.

The most convenient travel option is by Ryanair from Luton to Nîmes, where free transfer to the hotel will be provided. Other possibilities are by train (Eurostar and TGV) – please enquire.

Price £825 (deposit £200).

Single supplement £100. Maximum 10 places. Price includes Dinner B&B, and travel in France during the week. It is based on a shared en suite room, and a supplement is payable for a single occupancy. Cost of flights or other transportation to France is not included.



Duncan McEwan photo activities 2009 programme

ISLE OF SKYE

10-17 September 2009

Skye offers everything a landscape photographer could wish for – the Cuillin, Old Man of Storr, the Quiraing, Neist Point. Loch Slapin & Blaven, Elgol and many more. A trip to Loch Coruisk in the heart of the Black Cuillin may also be undertaken. Based in Portree (4 nights) and Kyle of Lochalsh (3 nights) with time in Kintail (Eilean Donan Castle etc). Co-led with Lee Frost. Photo Adventures: 01665-830523; info@leefrost.co.uk; www.photoadventures.co.uk

ORKNEY

26 September - 3 October 2009

Orkney is steeped in Norse and Viking history, as well as having some of the finest Neolithic sites in Europe – Skara Brae, Ring of Brodgar, Standing Stones of Stenness. The Atlantic coast offers wild, dramatic scenery – geos, caves, sea stacks, arches, the cliffs. A highlight will be the visit to the Island of Hoy where Rackwick Bay is considered one of the most beautiful places in Orkney. Light and Land: 01432-839111; contactus@lightandland.co.uk; www.lightandland.co.uk

TORRIDON

8-13 October 2009

Torridon has become a firm favourite

with landscape photographers due to wonderful mountains, glens, lochs and coast. There is no better time to see it than in late Autumn when, apart from the colours, wonderful atmospheric conditions can occur. Based in Gairloch. Co-led with Lee Frost. Photo Adventures: 01665-830523; info@leefrost.co.uk; www.photoadventures.co.uk

ASSYNT AND N.W. HIGHLANDS

17-23 October 2009

Based in Ullapool, this trip will explore the areas of Coigach and Assynt where there are many distinctively shaped mountains including Stac Polly and Suilven. Loch Assynt offers Ardvreck Castle and the tree-clad islands will prove irresistible. North of Lochinver is a wonderful coastline that includes fantastic sands and the rugged headland of Stoer Point. On-site E6 film processing. Inversnaid: 01877-386254; info@inversnaidphoto.com; www.inversnaidphoto.com

Bookings should be made with the individual organisers. Information can be had from them or from: Duncan McEwan: 01505-612673; mcewan@dunarden.fsnet.co.uk; www.dmcewanphotography.co.uk



Head for the Highlands – and further north too – with Duncan McEwan.
Glen Coe, photographed by Duncan using the Sony Alpha 900/24-70mm CZ..



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'At all speeds the images are simply jaw dropping. There really aren't superlatives enough in the dictionary to state how good the images from this camera are!'

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