



## you and your camera



In the second on this three part series, Richard Hill continues to explore the advantages and potential possibilities using digital cameras.

## Part 2: Focus and Composition



**At the outset**, please remember that this is not an exhaustive guide to digital photography. It is designed to assist photography enthusiasts to take better pictures using basic digital cameras and techniques. For more in-depth information, we recommend that readers consult a dedicated magazine such as the new *Digital Camera Magazine*, further details of which are given later in this article. This month we also offer the chance for one lucky reader of *Canals & Rivers* to win a years subscription to *Digital Camera Magazine*!

### Back to basics

Creating powerful photographs begins with the eye of the photographer. One of the most basic elements that go into a good photograph is composition. The way things are arranged in an image can considerably enhance its' impact.



### Composition

Composition focuses (no pun intended!) on how to arrange your subject in the frame and not on other technicalities of shooting digital images such as using a flash, shooting in different modes etc.

The Rule of Thirds is one of the most popular rules in photography. Observing the Rule of Thirds will help you take nicely balanced pictures that are easy on the eye. Imaginary lines are drawn dividing the image into thirds both horizontally and vertically. You place important elements, of your composition where these lines intersect. In the case of **(picture A)**, this is the people on the boat and the paddle gear.

As well as using the intersections you can arrange areas into bands occupying a third or place things along the imaginary lines. As you can see it is fairly simple to implement.

In this example, you can see that also there are nicely composed pictures within overall picture. These have been separated out so that you can see what I mean **(see: B and C)**

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Obviously you can only observe these rules if you have control. So what can you control?

Take for example the photograph of N B *Khayamazi* **(see picture D)** crossing the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct on a wet and windy day last August. Obviously it's practically impossible to control either of the boats, nor the weather. However, it was clear in advance that *Khayamazi* was a very photogenic boat, but that to enhance the appearance, would be better photographed against the plain background of the trees. As she was travelling against the 4mph flow of the Llangollen Canal it was relatively easy to get ahead of her on foot, and another couple of rather plain hire boats ahead in order to take a



couple of practice shots before *Khayamazi* came into shot.

So, wherever possible, take some test shots. If waiting at a lock for example, take a few shots of boats as they lock-through ahead of the boat you actually want to photograph. Once you've got the shot you were really after, the test shots and any other shots can be deleted.



### Zoom

Digital cameras usually offer two types of zoom: optical and digital. Optical zoom physically alters the lenses of the camera in the same way that lenses are used in binoculars. However, when using a digital zoom, the camera enlarges the image area at the centre of

the frame and discards the outside edges of the image. But therein lies a big disadvantage - using the digital zoom affects the image resolution.

Photographs taken using digital zoom may be satisfactory when used on a web page, or in an e-mail, the clarity is lost when the image is printed full size. The picture becomes fuzzy or pixelated.

The photographs (**E and F - overleaf**), were both taken from a distance using a zoom feature. The one of the left (**E**) was taken using an optical zoom while the one of the right (**F**) was taken using a digital zoom.



**Caution!** Whenever taking photographs near water extreme care should be taken. Concentrating on taking a good picture can distract the photographer

from potential unseen dangers and hazards. When taking 'low angle' shots, always be aware of approaching craft and their subsequent splashes and bow waves. When taking shots from aboard a moving craft, get someone to keep an eye out for that overhanging branch or low bridge that you may not see. When composing a shot near the waters' edge, always take the camera away from your eye and look before you reposition your body before reframing.





# DIGITAL ZOOM OR OPTICAL ZOOM?



### Automatic features

Most digital cameras feature automatic functions. Most accomplished photographers will turn these features off. However, they are invaluable to amateur photographers, but sometimes they can 'over-rule' the wishes of the photographer. Let's look at ways of 'tricking' the automatic function of cameras in order to be more creative.

Digital cameras use some nifty electronic tricks to calculate data about the image, before deciding what aperture, depth of field, and exposure setting to use. But generally, they do this by analysing the centre portion of the image (**Picture G**).

To 'trick' the camera, the photographer can use some basic techniques. The picture (**H**) is not only a pleasant composition, it tells the viewer a lot about the picture without the need for descriptive words. But what does it say? There's actually quite a lot of information in the image. Firstly, the photographer sets the scene by showing that it's on a canal or navigable river by

showing the narrow boat (albeit out of focus) in the background. It shows the season, depicted by the daffodils, and it shows that there are abundant daffodils alongside the towpath. But the photographer has decided that the daffodil should be the dominant feature of the image, deliberately affecting the 'depth of field' to ensure that the dominant daffodil is in clear, crisp focus, while the remainder of the image is slightly out of focus.



You can see how this image was captured in **picture I (opposite page, top)**:

1) The photographer decides on the basic composition of the shot, prior to the narrow boat passing by. The composition however will be better if the daffodil (although the predominant feature in the image) is not in the centre of the image, but about one third of the way into the left hand side of the image (see *Composition - rule of thirds*).

2) The photographer zooms in on the daffodil, ensuring that the important part of the image (that which must be in sharp focus) is in the centre. The photographer then presses the shutter half way down so that the camera calculates the image to bring the trumpet of the



daffodil into sharp focus and the correct aperture and exposure settings.

3) The photographer while keeping the shutter partially depressed then zooms out and reframes the image to the desired composition before depressing the shutter fully to capture the image.

The resultant image is a pleasing composition with the daffodil in sharp focus, 1/3 of the way across the image and facing 'into' the image.

This technique of 'tricking' the camera's computer can be used widely to 'force' the camera to adjust to the photographer's requirements without the need for an 'in depth' understanding of shutter speeds, apertures, etc.



#### Lighting

A bright sunny day can cause lighting problems. The vast contrast between the elements in shadow compared to those in sharp sunlight can be too great. In such circumstances, it's wise to take some test shots.

A bright but cloudy day is often better for photography. The lighting is diffused and softer, whereas bright sunlit skies causes 'hard lighting' and a considerable contrast between elements in sunlight and those in shadow.



However, the best shots during strong sunlight are early in the morning, or late evening when the sun is low in the sky.



#### Portrait and landscape layouts

The terms 'portrait' and 'landscape' formats refer to the ratio of width to height, not the content of the picture. The picture shown **above in J** is an example of a photograph taken in 'portrait' format, where the width is narrower than the height. Naturally the camera has to be rotated through 90 degrees for taking shots in portrait format. Images taken in the same plane as the camera are described as 'landscape' shots as in the example **K, left**.

**Part 3 – March 2006: Next month, we will cover resolution and look at various ways of presenting photographs. Now, turn the page and enter our great digital photography COMPETITION!**



you and your camera

**WIN**

A 12 month subscription to Digital Camera Magazine AND Canals & Rivers PLUS have your photograph published in this magazine



**Canals & Rivers** has teamed up with **Digital Camera Magazine**, to bring you a unique photography competition. The winner will receive a years free subscription to *Digital Camera Magazine* and

will have their photograph published either on the front cover (for portrait format) of *Canals & Rivers* magazine or as a double page spread (for landscape format) as part of our Canals in Colour series.

#### Front cover tips

When taking photographs aimed at becoming front covers, photographers should bear in mind the placing of 'overlaid' text - look at magazine front covers to see what we mean. Consideration should be given to allow the magazine title to be overlaid over the top quarter of the image without spoiling the image whilst also allowing the overlaying of text (main features list) over the bottom half of the image.



#### Submission

Only digital images will be considered. Images should be submitted in high resolution (More on resolution next month). Submissions will be accepted via e-mail or on CD-ROM. Only one submission per address. Normal A.E. Morgan competition rules apply. Copyright remains with the photographer.

#### E-mail submissions

Images should be sent as an attachment to an e-mail. The e-mail should contain the entrants name, postal address and telephone number along with a brief description of the image, location etc. Submissions should be sent to [competition@canalandriverboat.com](mailto:competition@canalandriverboat.com)

#### CD-Rom submissions

The CD-Rom should have written on the disc (using appropriate pen or labelling) the entrants name, postal address and telephone number along with a brief description of the image, location etc. Submissions should be sent to: **The Editor, Canals & Rivers Magazine, PO Box 618, Norwich NR7 0QT.**

(Sorry, but CD-Roms will **not** be returned) The closing date for applications is 30 April 2006.



#### In-depth information

If you're hooked on digital photography and want more detailed tips, tricks, techniques and tutorials, then we recommend **Digital Camera Magazine**, the newest, biggest and best digital camera magazine in the world.

**Digital Camera Magazine** comes with 148 pages, a pull-out 8-page section, 2 CDs, 5 tips cards and a larger-than-usual page size. Each month the magazine includes essential tutorials on photography and image editing, showing you how to take better pictures, tweak your images for best quality, take pictures and turn them into pieces of art, repair and restore damaged photos. Digital Camera Magazine also offers beginner-friendly help enabling you to get started with your camera, find out how it works and how to use it and have your questions answered by experts.

Plus much, much more.

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