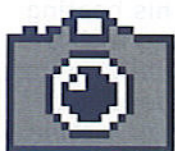


In this three part series, Richard Hill explores the advantages and potential possibilities using digital cameras. In this issue Richard shares some basic tips, tricks and techniques that will help you take powerful and punchy pictures

## Part 1: The Basics



**From the outset**, let me explain that this series is not an extensive 'in-depth' guide to

digital photography but aims to explore the basic aspects. It will act as a guide to taking photographs that hopefully your friends and family will actually find enjoyable, entertaining, enlightening and even educational. We'll also be looking at what you can expect for your money, as well as looking at ways of being creative by being able to 'digitally' manipulate your images.

Digital photography has revolutionised the medium but can also be a double-edged sword. When we relied on conventional 'film', and the associated costs, including developing and printing, we were perhaps more selective and 'economic' in the number of photographs we took. On the other hand, we often missed the best photo opportunities and had to wait until the film was 'full' and had been processed before we could view the results, by which time it was usually too late to go back for any retakes.

In this respect, digital cameras have the edge. Images can be immediately reviewed and re-taken if necessary. Many shots of the same scene or event can be taken, perhaps

using different angles and settings with more scope for experimentation.

So we can economically take many more images. The downside is that we often find it difficult to make a shortlist selection of which images we want to share with others, so run the risk of including our bland, boring pictures!

**Digital photography can be enjoyed by everyone**

Last July, young Nathan Plenty (pictured, below), received a reconditioned Olympus C-5050

for his fifteenth birthday. Although no longer manufactured, this camera is packed with features including the availability of a large number of accessories such as wide-angle lenses, useful for taking photographs within the confines of a narrow boat. The camera also has a 'flip-up' LCD (Liquid Crystal Display) viewfinder, an extremely useful addition for taking unusual 'low angle' shots, more on which will be covered later. Finding a reasonable reconditioned camera such as this will enable anyone on a moderate budget (£100 - £150) to obtain a camera offering facilities and features normally only available on much more expensive brand new cameras. Cameras such as the C-5050 Zoom produce sharper, more lifelike images due to their ultra-bright zoom lens and five million pixel resolution. More on resolution next month.

If your budget is more modest, there are a range of af-



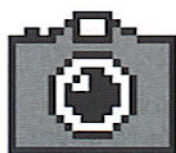
Fifteen-year-old Nathan Plenty takes photographs on the Slough Arm of the Grand Union Canal using his Olympus C-5050 (inset).

fordable digital cameras that can be purchased for under £30. However, such cameras do have certain restrictions. The viewfinder is limited to a basic LCD and simple parallel eyepiece. They tend to have lower resolution and image storage capacity. The most important potential drawback is that some will only retain stored images providing the battery does not fail, so it's important to regularly download the images to a computer to prevent them from being lost. The advantage of this type of camera is that they can often double as a web-cam for little more than the cost of a dedicated version.

Retired nurse Heather White (right) has been a keen amateur photographer for many years, but found the cost of film and processing restricting. She embraced digital photography after working alongside professional photographer and artist Helen Marshall during the making of a television documentary. Heather finds the ability to instantly review her images extremely useful allowing her to re-take any photographs if she's not entirely happy. The advantage of digital cameras, and the slow moving environment of our inland waterways means that there's rarely an instance when it's not possible to re-take an interesting shot.



**Retired nurse Heather White only recently discovered digital photography. Here she snaps away at Slough Canal Festival.**



### Share your shots

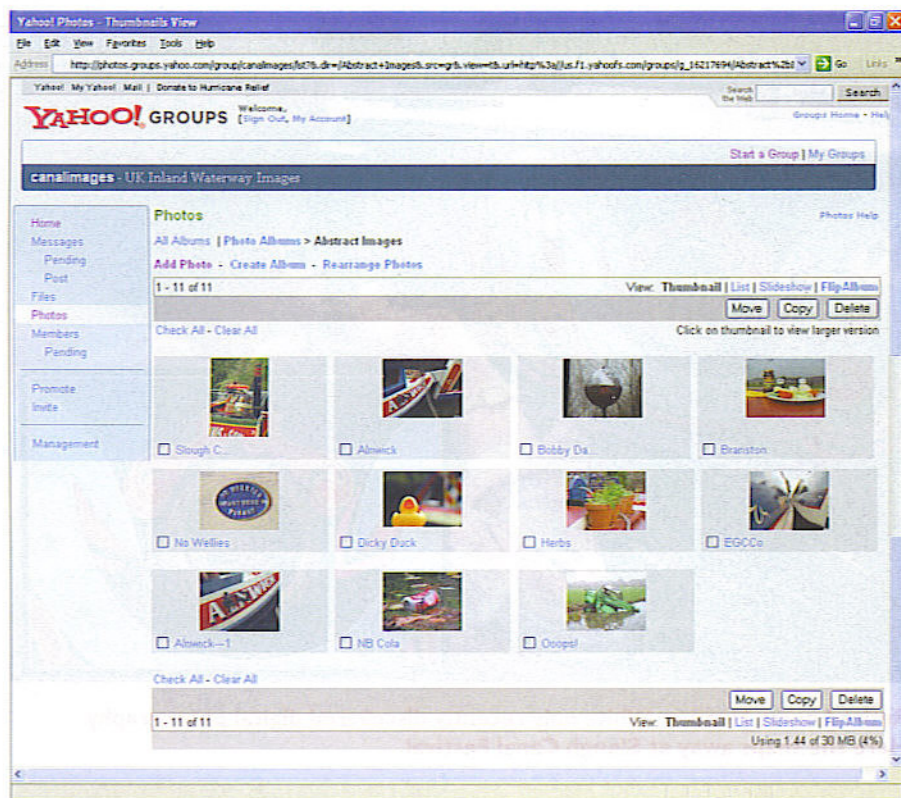
Another advantage of digital photography is the immediacy in which images can be shared with people via the internet. This is a facility that is important to many people including engineer Shirish Swami (below) who can share his images with friends and family here at home and overseas. This method of sharing images is becoming increasingly popular. Images

can be attached to e-mails, uploaded to online albums that can be shared with selected contacts, and sent instantly using various real time messenger services. Images can also be uploaded and shared using 'community groups' provided by certain companies such as MSN and Yahoo!

The more interesting and innovative images offer the possibility of getting your photographs published in a magazine such as this. Steve Arnott (pictured overleaf) is a professional freelance photographer, and taking quality photographs is his bread and butter so uses a professional SLR (single lens reflex) camera for his work. However, this does not preclude amateur photographers from getting their images into print, and getting paid for it. Unlike professional photographers, often working to strict commissioning requirements and tight deadlines, amateurs have the luxury of being able to take much more time on producing publishable photographs. They are also much more likely to be in the right place at the right time. But remember, magazine editors also have certain requirements relating to resolution, format and content. In magazines such as this, images, just like the words they accompany have to earn their place



**Main image shows Shirish Swami at Slough Canal Festival in September 2005. Inset, a picture taken by Shirish using a Sony Cybershot DSC-P71 camera.**



Images sent via the internet can also be uploaded and shared using 'community groups' provided by certain companies such as MSN and Yahoo!

on the page. They must be as interesting to a first-time reader as they are to someone who has been a committed reader for many years. Snapshots of your own or favourite boat taken without thought are unlikely to be accepted. (Editors requirements will be covered in the third and final part

of this series). But for whatever reason you want to share your pictures, just because you find them interesting doesn't mean that others will.

A good photograph is one that the observer finds pleasing to look at. In addition, a good photograph should stand out, without need for a detailed explanation. If it has to be explained in detail, it doesn't really work. However, a brief succinct caption or description of the date, location etc can be useful.

So what makes a powerful, persuasive and punchy photograph? Firstly, canal enthusiasts have an immediate advantage. Inland waterways offer a myriad of photo opportunities. History and heritage, urban and rural, flora and fauna, wonderful wildlife and waterscapes. In fact the photographic possibilities are almost endless.



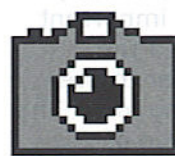
#### Another angle

The first tip is to look at the environment from another angle. We are conditioned to

look at the world from eye-level, but you can be constructively creative by being really observant and consider what a

photograph might look like if taken from an unusual angle.

The photograph (below) was taken from a low angle, giving an almost unique and unusual 'ducks eye view' of the cut. However, when taking such photographs, you must take special care to protect both yourself, and of course your camera.



#### Natural framing

Bridgeholes and other 'natural' features can help make a dramatic natural 'frame' to

your image. The picture (opposite, top) is enhanced by the natural framing of the bush branches in the foreground. Likewise, in the picture (opposite, bottom) the branches, bridge arch and foreground flowers combine to make a powerful photograph of hotel boats *Morpeth* and *Alnwick* emerging from the lock at Stoke Bruene. However, when taking photographs of boats passing through bridgeholes, remember that as they enter the bridge, they temporarily pass through darkness, resulting in a massive contrast in brightness. This picture was taken before the pair of boats went into the shadow, but it could have



Taking a photograph from an unusually low angle adds a feeling of movement to the image.



Steve Arnott, here taking pictures using a top-of-the-range professional SLR digital camera.



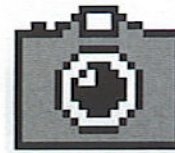
**Caution!** Whenever taking photographs near water extreme care should be taken. Concentrating on taking a good picture can distract the photographer from potential unseen dangers and hazards. When taking 'low angle' shots, always be aware of approaching craft and their subsequent splashes and bow waves. 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.



**ABOVE:** Using natural features such as these branches can add a dramatic 'natural frame' to a photograph. **BELOW:** The branches, bridge arch and foreground flowers combine to make a powerful photograph of hotel boats *Morpeth* and *Alnwick* emerging from a lock at Stoke Bruerne.

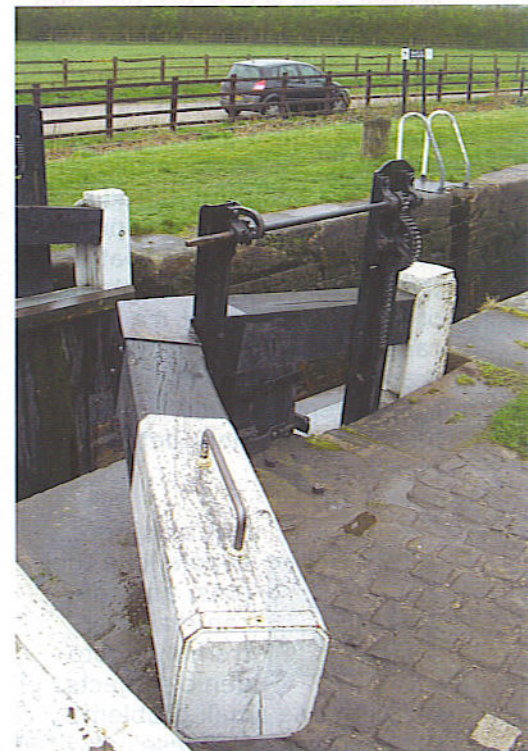


worked equally as well as they emerged.



### Canal curiosities

Unusual architectural features such as these dog-legged lock gate balance beams make for an interesting image. There are many such curiosities on our inland waterways. You just have to keep a sharp look-out for them!



**Keep a look out for the unique, such as this unusual style of lock balance beam.**

A combination of an alternative angle and architecture are combined in this picture (first shot overleaf) make an appealing and attractive image. It was framed in advance and anticipation of the approaching narrow boat and taken when the boat came into shot, and example of a photographed planned in advance.

Planning photographs in advance can be fun. A busy waterway is always helpful in achieving this, giving you plenty of opportunity to plan, take, and re-take if necessary, many shots of the same scene.

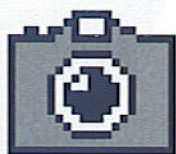
### Close-up and creative

An image can have impact even if the object of your passion is



Always keep your eyes open for an unusual 'point of view' that the casual observer may not always spot.

not the predominant feature. This picture (below) is not only pleasing, but it also says something. It's pleasing in the sense that it's a beautiful daffodil, which clearly suggests spring-time, and the narrow boat in the background, although out of focus, shows that it's a canalside scene. This photograph makes use of a feature called 'depth of field' which will be covered in more detail next month.



#### Pet subjects

People love their pets, and they can make extremely photogenic subjects.

But with one small problem; they rarely say 'cheese'. A



**Pictures of pets need patience. Animals rarely do as they're told for a photographer, and this 'sitting' took ten attempts before Rosie looked her best!**

well-disciplined pet may sit where it's told, but you'll have to have a lot of patience before you get that golden nugget shot. This is where digital photography comes into its' own. You can keep snapping away as many pictures as you need to until you get one that you really like. Simply delete the rest! This photograph of *Rosie* (above) took over ten attempts before she decided to 'smile for the camera'!

This picture (below, right) of Hawkesbury Junction could

have been taken many years ago, but it was taken less than twelve months ago (sharp eyed readers will spot the modern buildings in the background). But it's been digitally and simply manipulated to give the impression of age, which in a way, makes it more interesting than the original, taken on a wet, damp, dark and gloomy day. In the third part of this series, we'll be looking at the various effects that can be achieved using standard software as well as ways of presenting photographs, and using them for unusual gifts, including mugs, mousemats, calendars and cards. In the meantime, get snapping!



This is an example of using 'depth of field'. The foreground clearly shows it's spring, while the background, deliberately out of focus, is clearly canalside. More on depth of field in the next part of the series.



This 'sepia' image of Hawkesbury Junction could easily be mistaken for a shot taken some years ago when in fact it was taken less than twelve months ago, but has been digitally manipulated - more of which will be covered in greater detail next month.