

# Hird About The Place

The Scene by Hird Newsletter.

Edition #13: June 2005

Dear Friends,

Well, here it is again – your favourite piece of regular junk mail. No, wait, that's not right – it's your favourite piece of quality literature, delivered to you each month without charge.

## Why I Still Favour Film

In the last edition of this newsletter, I talked about digital cameras and how good they are becoming. Just so I don't give the wrong impression, please allow me to rave on (and on, and on....M) about film for a few paragraphs.

During this article, I'll need to compare my own equipment with the digital equipment which most closely matches the quality I can achieve. Since I shoot with large format film,\* I need to compare my work with that captured by 22MP digital backs for medium format cameras. The quality is not the same, but it's as close as we can easily compare, since nobody makes a usable sensor which matches the surface area of my film.

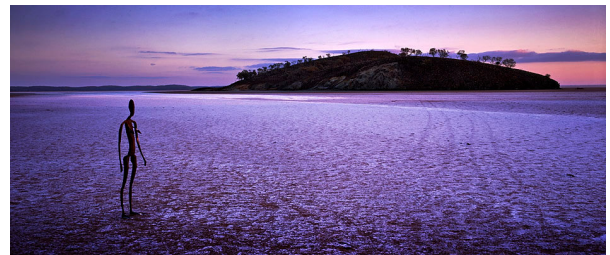
While the best digital cameras are certainly capable of producing amazing photographs, I still use film for my work for several reasons.

Number one is the quality of the image captured by a 5x4" piece of film. Nothing under \$50,000<sup>†</sup> comes close to recording what I can capture with around \$4000 of large format camera equipment and a \$14 sheet of film. That quality of image allows me to make BIG prints which are very, very sharp. And if I bought myself a 10x8 camera, I could capture four times the detail of my current camera!

\* meaning each image captured has an area roughly 14 times bigger than that found on a 35mm film.

<sup>†</sup> A 22MP "back" costs \$50,000, the camera to attach it to will cost \$5,000 including only one lens and I'll still need to buy a 1GB card to store the images .....

However, that would be overkill – my 5x4" film has more resolution than I need. It has been estimated that each piece of 5x4" film contains about 1GB of usable information. It's as if I were shooting with a 300MP digital camera requiring no batteries or card drive.



*"Lake Ballard"*

*A good quality scan of this film would allow me to enlarge this picture to 1.7m across. No digital camera I can afford would allow me to make such a large print.*

Which brings me to my next point – when travelling into remote areas (as I am known to do), storage of digital information from high end cameras can become problematic. On a long trip with a digital capture system, I could easily generate a hundred gigabytes of information, requiring a large portable hard drive or even a laptop computer to be carried. I don't fancy its chances bouncing around in the back of my car on the Gibb River Road!

Film isn't so fragile and is much easier to manage: a large insulated box (eg. an esky) is just about perfect for storing film on a long trip.

The sensor in high end digital cameras is susceptible to dust. A piece of dust which has settled unnoticed on the sensor will record on every shot made with the camera until the sensor is cleaned – a delicate operation in itself. Each new speck of dust just adds more work for later. Each image must be "cleaned" during editing using a program like Photoshop.

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Film is also susceptible to dust, but since each shot is taken on a new piece of film, the dust does not build up over time.

While it hasn't happened to me yet, there is always the possibility of dropping my camera, either whilst it's mounted on my tripod or during normal handling to set it up. Since my camera is made of wood, glass and brass, most damage can be repaired with simple tools and materials. Water? Let the camera dry out and I'm back in action. There are no electronics in my camera. Should the camera be destroyed or stolen, my insurance company won't put me out of business next year with their premium increase.

I shudder to think of the consequences of even the most benign topple from 1.5m with \$50,000 in electronics at stake. How about a "drop in the ocean"? Add a dash of salt water to one of these little beauties and the arteries will definitely harden!!!!

My final issue with digital capture is easily rectified with a disciplined file storage and back-up routine, but I'm not good at discipline.

Using a digital camera to capture imagery *absolutely requires* backups of original files be made immediately following downloading of the files. As soon as they are on the computer, the "wise photographer" burns them to CD or DVD and takes them to a safe location separate from the computer (like a bank vault, for instance). That ensures protection from disaster like fire or computer failure. Every two years, the files are copied to new CDs or DVDs or the LGSM<sup>‡</sup> to ensure their security for future generations.

However, I am not a wise photographer: I can't imagine myself being disciplined enough to make the first backup, nor the biannual copies (for ever and ever, amen ....).

Film capture of images allows me to store the original image in a format which is immune to "technology creep": that insidious disease which disables old data over time. Remember 5¼" floppy disks, vinyl records, cassette tapes and beta video? Do you own any device which is capable of

accessing the information on these media? Personally, I am not good at keeping old information on up-to-date media, so film is perfect for me as my storage media for high quality images. I know that in twenty years, I'll be able to scan my films at a better quality than I can now, and I'll still be able to browse through my files visually without the latest computer to help me.



"Judds"

So, to summarise why high quality film is better than high quality digital for me:

1. Quality – 5x4" film still reigns over digital for image quality.
2. Film is logistically easier to handle on extended trips into remote areas.
3. I don't depend on batteries to use my camera.
4. The problem of dust is minimised by using film
5. Should the unthinkable occur, large format field cameras made of wood can be repaired with minimal equipment by the owner, often in the field.
6. A large format film camera is less fragile than a comparable digital camera.
7. Capital outlay is around 90% less for a high quality film camera than a high quality digital camera. Insurance is less too.
8. The image capture medium is also the storage medium. There is no need to make digital back-ups and keep them on the current LGSM – film is "future proof".
9. This last one wasn't mentioned in the body of the article, but shooting and editing film is FUN!!!!

<sup>‡</sup> Latest Greatest Storage Media

## Scene by Hird Quiz Night A Success!

The quiz night we ran on 13/05/05 was a resounding success. We raised nearly \$9,000 for St John Ambulance Service, with some of that (about \$3,000) being raised through raffle ticket sales. The good people at St John Ambulance were very pleased to receive such a boost to their coffers! If you're in Kalgoorlie and have a worthy cause you'd like to raise money for, give us a call – we may be able to help.

## Lost – 20kg of Graeme

There's something missing from my life lately: it's been hanging around for the last 11 years and I *was* sort of attached to it. I'm not really trying to find it and I don't know where it went, but I'm certainly glad it's gone.

So, how did I lose 20kg since the middle of January? Salad. That's pretty well it – no snacking, no fatty foods, few starchy foods, very small serves of what I previously ate, and HUGE salads to make up for the small servings of other foods.

I've been riding a bicycle each lunch time to increase the amount of physical work I do (I wasn't doing any real exercise until I bought my mountain bike in January). That exercise, while not removing much weight, has helped suppress my appetite, so I haven't been hungry at all during this process. It has also made me much fitter and healthier.

I've improved the environment too: I reckon I've starved a few rabbits out of their homes.

## Photo Tip – Sunsets and Sunrises

Since this month's Photo of the Month is a sunset, I thought you may like to know how to make good photographs of these "everyday" subjects.

Photographically, there is little difference between a sunset and a sunrise. In most cases, the viewer will not be able to pick the difference unless they know the location the shot was taken from. Of course, most sane people rarely see a sunrise, but

I'll leave discussion of my mental health out of this newsletter ....

In some locations, a sunset will contain more red than a sunrise due to the raising of dust and smoke during the day. The sunsets can also be duller near coastal areas due to water particles (sea mist) and vapour filtering the light, especially when it's windy. When these conditions prevail, sunrise is the time to be out photographing.



*"Skies Of Gold" – the Photo of the Month in June*

One of the reasons I rarely print sunset photographs for the gallery is that just about everybody and every camera can take good shots of them (which means I can't sell them ....). Here's how you do it:

1. Have your camera with you when there is a great sunset happening (well, DUH! ☺)
2. Find a location with a strong foreground subject which will look good in silhouette (because that is all it will be in your shot).
3. Set your exposure by pointing the camera near the sun without actually including the sun in the frame. Choose the exposure indicated by the camera. (If the sun has already set, skip this step and use the exposure indicated during Step 4.)
4. Realign the camera to make a strong composition. Make sure the exposure matches the pre-determined value if the sun is in the frame (that's where a manual camera can be an advantage).
5. Fire at will!

It really is *that* simple to make good sunset shots. However, sunrise shots are much more difficult. You'll need to add a crucial step before Step 1 to make superb sunrise shots. We'll call it Step 0, and here it is: get out of bed, ya lazy sod! Now, I know it sounds difficult, and few people can perform it consistently with the skill of a true professional, but it is worth practicing. Having the

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support of a loving spouse can help, especially if what she loves is the doona and she volunteers to drag it off you at 5 in the morning, every morning.



*"A Gratuitous Photo"*

*included here for no reason other than I like it....*

## JPC Photo Exhibition Opening

The year 9 students at John Paul College are holding an exhibition of their photography at the Mining Hall Of Fame in Kalgoorlie, starting on 25<sup>th</sup> of June at 2.00pm. I've been honoured with the pleasant task of saying a few words to declare the exhibition open.

I met up with the students in mid-May to discuss things photographic, and very much enjoyed the experience. I presume they also enjoyed the talk I presented, since their teacher confirmed that he would still like me to open the exhibition!

If you would like to attend the opening, give me a call by 10<sup>th</sup> of June and I'll pass on your RSVP to the school. They'd love to have you there.

## K-BANG Newsletter

There is a new arts group in town – the Kalgoorlie Boulder Arts Network Group, or K-BANG for short. They are producing a bi-monthly newsletter, so keep your eyes open for it around town. In it, you will find information about all sorts of arts and entertainment in the Goldfields, and even an article or two from me. The newsletter is free and available from various cafes and art suppliers, including Scene by Hird.

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We've now reached our first anniversary of publishing this newsletter and it seems to get easier each month. I hope you are enjoying it and still finding interesting articles within it. Don't forget, if you want to know anything about photography, please ask us – it may just spark an article for this esteemed publication ....

Michelle will be away for a while in June, so shop hours may be a bit erratic for the week beginning 20 June. Our very good friend Tracy will be covering some of the 'school hours' and I'll be here as usual from 3.30pm. I hope this doesn't inconvenience anyone too much. I'll be writing to you again in July, so stay safe and have fun.

Cheers,

*Graeme Hird*

PS – There has been a late protest from Michelle. She claims I have wronged her by stating she takes the doona at 5 each morning: it's more like 3.30.... it just takes me that long to wake up.

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