

# Hird About The Place

## The Scene by Hird Newsletter.

Edition #18: November 2005

### Dear Friends,

They're BACK! My ethereal friends (the words) returned to play me this month, so I've been able to deliver a full length newsletter as promised. I don't know what happened in October – maybe I offended the Troll Gods or some such nonsense.

Let's not waste them on introductory trivialities – get on with the story!

### A Trunkful Of Ghosts

The Photo of the Month for November is my favourite photo from my collection of images. It's my favourite for reasons beyond its aesthetics – the following story of its creation should explain why I'm so partial to it:



*My favourite picture: "The Haunted Wood"*

The story behind the photograph started in 1997, when I first bought my Tachihara large format camera. At the time, I had only ever used 35mm cameras, and my "success rate" of approximately one good shot per roll of 36 exposures did not inspire confidence in my ability to avoid bankruptcy whilst shooting with the new format.

The camera uses sheets of film measuring 4"x5", and at \$14 per photo (the cost of processed colour film for the camera), my financial officer (read "my wife") insisted I only shoot black and white film until I learnt how to work the camera efficiently – they only cost \$2 per shot.

Black and white photography requires the recognition of textures, tones and form in a scene: the use of colour to highlight parts of the scene is not possible (obviously ...). I had never tried to shoot B&W exclusively until then, so it was a totally new experience for me to search for subjects in which colour was of no importance.

So it came to be that I was using B&W film on that day in 1998 – I was being a cheapskate! (Nothing new there ... ☺). On the day I took this shot, I had been out looking for items of interest to photograph. One hill in particular had previously caught my attention as I travelled the road between Ora Banda and Broad Arrow. It had one light grey tree and dark red rocks – a good example of contrast and form which I thought I should explore visually.

As it turned out, the shot I thought I could see from the road was not worth capturing on closer inspection (which happens more often than I would like to admit, but that's another story ...). However, since I was there and the light was not going to last long enough for me to move to a new location, I thought I had better explore the area more carefully on foot.

I approached *The One Tree* and was immediately captivated by the fact that it was much older than it first appeared. Evidently, it had been knocked down in a storm many years before and now only clung to life via a few roots on one side of the trunk. The rest of the (now horizontal) trunk had rotted away, leaving the inside exposed to the weather. A crust of dead wood was all that

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protected the living sap-wood on the underside of the trunk.



*"The Living Dead": The One Tree still grows on its hill  
between Ora Banda and Broad Arrow*

Knowing texture is accentuated by side lighting, I investigated the shapes found inside the trunk in the late afternoon sun light. Although there were interesting forms to be found, the light was still a little too harsh for photography, creating too much contrast between the shadows and highlights. I could imagine what would happen as the light softened, so I prepared to make an exposure – and I waited.

While I waited with my camera prepared, I looked more carefully at the wood. "That looks like a face!" I thought to myself. "And there's another. And another!"

The wood was infested with ghosts! I didn't notice them until I gave myself the time to really look carefully at the tree's trunk. I still had time to rearrange my composition to best show these faces, so I moved my camera into a more appropriate position.

Of course, they aren't really faces: we see them because our minds are so adept at recognising facial geometry: two eyes, a nose and a mouth. In fact, the only reason I found these was because I looked at the wood "sideways" – the faces aren't visible until you straddle the trunk. If you turn page one 90 degrees clockwise, you will see how the wood looks "the right way up" – the soft side-lighting which was present becomes top-lighting when the print is rotated into my preferred orientation. That "top-lighting" accentuates the "faces" contained in the decaying wood.

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I commonly use the word "made" when I refer to the process of creative photography, because the phrase "taking a photo" implies a passive role for the photographer. When the photographer "makes" a photograph, they have more input than the simple capture of a natural event on film – they create **art** with the subjects around them.

The term "making a photo" comes closer to representing my thought processes as I go about my photography.

The process of "making" this photograph required more darkroom skills than I possessed when I captured the image on film. A "straight" print of the negative was, shall we say, singularly uninspiring. My first attempts at enlarging the negative showed a few grey swirls of somewhat interesting wood, though hardly the stuff of my dramatic imaginings.

Hence, when I *took the picture* I was not skilled enough to *make the photograph*. I could imagine the dramatic visage of faces and tortured wood, though expressing it in a print was impossible for me.

I filed the negative away, disappointed with my inability to bring out what I "saw" in the wood. Over the next five years, my skills in both capturing images and producing prints from the film improved considerably, so when I revisited the negative in 2003, I was finally able to produce a print I was happy with.

My initial problems came about because I was unable to control the print's contrast precisely in my darkroom. A skilful technician would have been able to make the print quite easily in a well equipped darkroom. However, I was neither well equipped nor skilful. By honing my skills for several years, a simple (though precise) contrast adjustment was all I needed to realise my visualised image. The rest was already on the film.

The Haunted Wood is a favourite of mine due to several factors:

- It was one of my first really successful images.
- It has been recognised internationally on photo.net as "Photo Of The Week" in

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August, 2003. The picture has since been viewed by 1.25 million people on that site.

- The photograph has universal appeal (well almost – it scares *some* small children ....)
- The style of the shot is very different to my usual style. It's quite difficult to see details like this in most situations, so it pleases me when my mind is stretched in unexpected directions
- Creating the final print only became possible once my skills had reached a certain level – fine control of the print's contrast was required to achieve the effect I desired. This print proved to me that I was capable of producing art through photography (i.e. "making a photograph"), rather than simply "taking snaps" and hoping for the best.

This image was the first in which I had been able to conceive of an idea and use an acquired skill to express the image I had in my mind. It's enormously satisfying to be able to create an image from both the raw building materials provided by nature and skills attained through perseverance.

I hope you enjoy the print as much as I do. But a word of warning – don't show it to your kiddies at bed time ....

## The Haunted ~~Wood~~ Coffee Table!

As a special presentation, we've designed and commissioned two coffee tables with this print embedded under a glass top (something like a three dimensional frame featuring this amazing print). These custom made tables are certainly exclusive to Scene by Hird, so when you're next passing the gallery, drop in and view these unique pieces of furniture. They are sure to become centrepieces of both your décor and your conversations, should you be fortunate enough to acquire one.

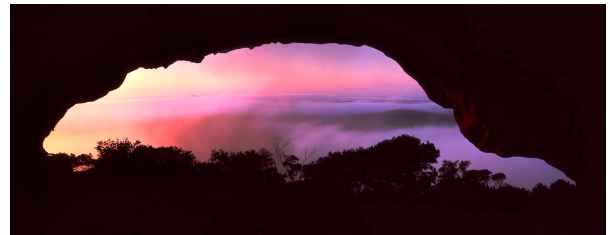
## Layby for Christmas so early?

Some canny customers are placing their Christmas gifts on layby already. They tell us they enjoy the convenience of being able to order their special gift now, knowing their "chosen one" will not stumble across it at home and spoil their surprise. Some people are even taking advantage of our free storage option by purchasing their picture now and leaving it with us for safe keeping. We are

more than happy to be accomplices in this sneaky surprise! Why not do the same with your special gifts this year?

## The Esperance Landscape Photography Workshop

Interest in the Esperance Landscape Photography workshop in February has been solid and judging by the comments so far, the 10 available places will be snapped up quickly. Therefore, I guess I had better supply some firm dates and an agenda for the trip, so you can make your plans to attend.



*Visit the "Home Of The Troll Gods" with me in February.*

It's a four day workshop, the dates being 17/02/06 through to 20/02/06. This workshop will show you how I work when I'm on location. You'll gain insights into the way I think while I'm gathering images for my gallery.

You'll learn how to:

- plan for the lighting conditions you want,
- visualise and prepare your compositions, and
- be ready when it all comes together for that "picture perfect" shot

The true art of landscape photography is being in the right place at the right time - I'll show you how to be there when it all happens.

The first day will be spent mainly refreshing your knowledge about the workings of your camera and how each control affects the final image. Any lasting doubts about controlling your camera will be dispelled with one-on-one and group lessons throughout the day. We probably won't be making too many prize winning photos that day, however we will get a taste for shooting at sunset.

The following three days will be a mixture of photographing and professional interaction, with every possible question answered on the spot. Each day we'll be out there at sunrise and sunset,

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cameras at the ready, capturing the beauty of Esperance and the surrounding landscapes. During the day we'll be scouting for new locations by bushwalking and driving.

I'll also introduce you to large format photography, allowing you to use my camera with personal tuition in how to go about using this wonderful camera system.

I would prefer to camp at Lucky Bay (Cape La Grande NP) for this workshop, but at this stage I'm flexible – I know many people prefer more salubrious accommodation. Camping on location is preferable since travel times at sunrise are reduced. It's also how I normally work, so for the genuine "Scene by Hird" photographic experience, camping in this beautiful location is highly recommend.



*Lucky Bay, Cape La Grande NP*

The cost of the workshop will be \$440 per person (inc. GST), which equates to only \$100 per day plus Mr Howard's kickback. However it does not include film, accommodation, food or travel; you will need to arrange those items for yourself. Depending on the mix of people who are interested, I may book a group of camp sites at Lucky Bay in Cape La Grande National Park.

For more information or to book your spot on this workshop, call me on 90 911 611 or email me on [graeme@scenebyhird.com](mailto:graeme@scenebyhird.com) soon. I'm sure this workshop will fill quickly, so please reserve your place as soon as you can. Let me know early if you would like to camp at Lucky Bay so I can make a group booking for us.

### **"Hey, where's my photo?"**

There have been a few people asking about the Photo of the Month print we usually send out with the newsletters. They were receiving it each month, and all of a sudden, it's gone!

"What's the story?" they ask.

The Photo of the Month is a subscription service which we provide free to all customers for twelve months from the date of their most recent purchase. After the twelve months is over, I am *supposed* to send you a letter informing you that your free subscription has finished and inviting you to subscribe for another 12 months - for only \$29.50.

Well that's the plan, anyway. However, lately I have failed in my duty to let people know why their print is no longer being sent. So there are about 60 people out there wondering what they have done to offend me so much that I have stopped sending their favourite junk mail. My apologies to you, and I promise to get a letter to you shortly.

In the meantime, just remember that it costs less than a loaf of bread each month to remain on the list of Photo of the Month recipients, so I urge you to consider this request carefully (for the sake of my children). Don't let **your** fridge go bare this summer: ring today and sponsor a naked fridge near you. ☺

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That's it once again. I've had my say for the month and it's been a pleasure, especially since the words were mine to command once again. I hope you found the newsletter interesting, and of course I'll write again next month.

With luck, I'll have some news in December which will totally transform the way our gallery operates. I can't say more at the moment, but if the stars align and I hold my mouth just so, Scene by Hird will be exhibiting a whole new level of service and quality as we move into 2006.

*Graeme Hird*