

Hird About The Place

The Scene by Hird Newsletter.

Edition #4: September 2004

Dear Friends,

Our first year in the gallery is nearly over and we are certainly another year ~~older~~ wiser Opening the gallery was a huge risk for us, because other than a love of beautiful photos and lots of enthusiasm, our business idea had little going for it. Neither of us has any experience in running a business or in retail sales, but despite ourselves, we have managed to finish off our first year in the black. They tell us that's rare, so we're pretty proud of it.

To all who have supported us and showed patience when we've blundered, we send you a big THANK-YOU!

Photo Tip

Here's an easy way to immediately improve your photos of family and friends: use a flash when the sun is shining on them. I can hear you now: "But isn't there already enough light when the sun is out?" True, but also not true. Where the sun shines on the person, there is certainly enough light, but in the shadows there won't be enough to balance the sun's light. The answer is to use the camera's flash to brighten the shadows up and even out the harsh lighting. It's called "fill flash" by the pros, and in any camera younger than ten years old, it is usually a built-in feature.

To do it manually, you need to set the exposure of the flash to be between 0.7 and 1.7 units less than the "main light" (ie the sun). Generally speaking though, the camera will do it automatically with a function called "fill" built into the flash settings of your camera. People with older SLR cameras should set their flash's auto setting to one aperture number lower than the one being used on the lens.

Even if you don't have "fill" as an option for your flash, simply turning it on when the sun is shining will be an improvement over no flash at all. The built-in flashes of most compact cameras (digital or film) are not strong enough to overpower the sun's light at normal picture-taking distances anyway, so it will probably be acting as a fill flash, whether you can control it or not.

If there is no sun shining directly on the person (eg they're in shadow or it's overcast) you won't need the flash because there isn't an extreme contrast range in the shot.

So – what's so special about the Goldfields?



"Edjudina"

At first glance, the Eastern Goldfields of WA would not seem to be an optimal place to start a landscape photography business, right? There are no majestic mountain ranges, no sparkling streams, no spectacular canyons and no waterfalls hiding in the mist. Who could possibly find this place interesting?

When I moved to the goldfields from the high country of Victoria 11 years ago, I was devastated. With my photographic skills still in their infancy, I was suddenly thrown into a place without any of the subjects I liked to photograph. Where would I find water, hills and tall trees? How could I possibly find something to interest me here, where there is only short,

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spindly trees, red dirt and salt lakes? Where would I find “inspiration” now?

We have an ancient landscape, literally tens of thousands of years old. Standing water and tall trees have no place here, it’s hot and harsh and once-towering hills have long since been eroded away by the ravages of time. The trees struggle to survive in the impoverished soil and rock. Any plant showing hints of green gets eaten by the kangaroos.

Five years after my arrival here, I finally started to “get it”. It took me that long to stop longing for things that weren’t here and see the beauty in this landscape for what it was. I had to stop imposing my preferences on the landscape and let it tell me what to photograph. I had to look more carefully at the reasons locals knew they were “home” after being away. What was it about the bush here that screams “Goldfields”?

If I’m asked to list those features now, two of the most obvious ones are the colours of the landscape and the weather. When a local approaches Kalgoorlie from any direction, we know we are getting close to home when the trees turn bronze, the dirt turns red and a storm is brewing on a summer afternoon.

Something a little less obvious to most people is the clarity and quality of the light we are blessed with here. It’s free of interference from atmospheric haze (read “smog”) so we get a beautiful clear, warm glow in the afternoon and at dawn – perfect for landscape photography if you can just find a subject to use it on!

When I started to think about the essence of the landscape and quality of our light, everything fell into place for me. I stopped looking for the “grand vista” shots that others from around the world can make so easily and started concentrating on the medium scale landscape. Subjects like the trees themselves, the craggy outcrops of low breakaways and the decaying remnants of human activities all suddenly jumped out as opportunities. The dynamic summer weather, incredible sunsets and

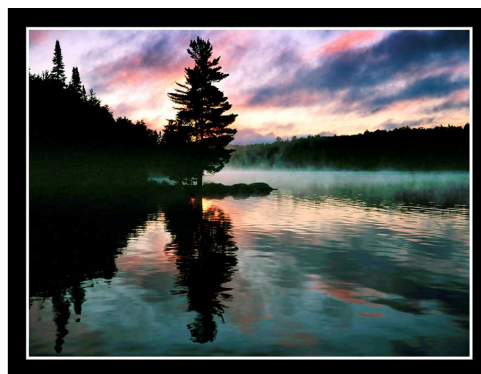
sunrises, gnarled dead wood, glowing living wood, brilliant white salt lakes, grey salt bush on red soil, bright green new eucalyptus leaves. Mines, lights, old huts, history, dams, corrugated iron, two up shed, shafts

The goldfields suddenly came alive with possibilities! Where were they hiding five years before? How come I couldn’t see them previously? What had changed?

What had changed was my perception of the way light interacts with our landscape. By imagining any given subject bathed in the best light, I am now able to anticipate opportunities to capture landscapes and subjects when they look their best. All I have to do is be there and ready when the light is perfect.

And in the Goldfields, that’s just about every morning and every afternoon.

Some Shots From Canada



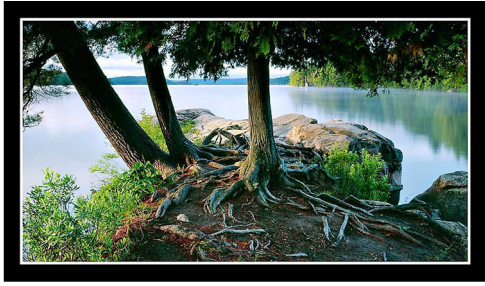
This shot and the next one are of the same trees on a lake shore in Algonquin Park, Ontario. I got to this site about 50 minutes before sunrise and set myself up to make the shot. While I waited for the light to improve, I listened to the birds calling and watched a beaver swim nearby, and every few minutes, a passing car! You wouldn’t believe just how many cars use the road that is just out of shot to the left of the above picture – even at 5.00am on a weekday.

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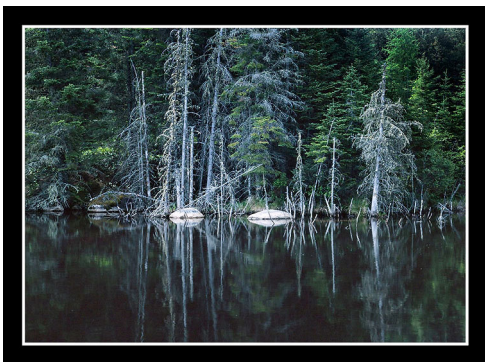
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By the time I made this image, the sun had been up for a few minutes and it was just starting to break through the trees on the eastern shore of this lake, giving me a diffused side light for this shot. On a larger print, you can still see mist rising from the lake's surface, even though it was summer at the time.



Postcard!!!! Yep, it's just like any postcard of Canada, but I like it It was shot though a polarising filter on Velvia film to really give the blue and green some punch.



This one is my favourite from my trip to Canada, though I find it hard to work out why.

Perhaps it's the rhythm between the trees, the water, the darkness and the rocks, something like an irregular heartbeat shown on a cardiogram – I don't really know In

any case, I'm going to make a big print of this one and hang it at my home.

Thanks

.... to all those people who supported St Johns Ambulance through our quiz night. The sponsors supplied lots of prizes for us to auction and raffle, and the attendees helped by buying tickets and by bidding well. We raised \$5,137 for St John's Ambulance and those attending had a good time. What more can you ask for?

A team consisting of geologists and their partners took out the major prize, winning by half a point – impressive after 100 questions! Well done, and thanks to The Mercure Plaza for supplying the major prize of a dinner for 6 and a night for two.

Lyn Bergin, from Coolgardie, won the raffle prize of the framed photograph. By itself, the raffle raised around \$2600 – once again, thanks for your support.

Computers! Who needs 'em?

This is just a little tip about Windows XP that I wish I knew earlier. Our new system crashed at the end of August, destroying all the data from the last 3 months. We had a few back-ups done, but it was still a major issue, and continues to be as I write this (we still don't have the computer back from the "digital doctor", so I'm writing on the old computer) .

One good thing to come from the incident was learning that Windows XP actually has it's own back-up system built in – if you know where to find it! Go to Start->Accessories->System Tools->Back-up and have a look at the options. With DVD burners becoming more common, it's now possible to do a systematic back-up of important data on a regular basis. If only I knew about it before the last week of August!

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Photography Workshops!

I know many of you have been wondering what's happening with the photography workshops I am offering. (I know, I know it's been a long wait and I haven't come through with the goods. Sorry, no excuses except for not having the time to do them.) Well, the wait is nearly over. The beginners' workshops are written and ready to present, and I'll be contacting those who've indicated they'd like to do them. The first one will be held on the 24th of September. SLR workshops will not be far behind.

The beginners' courses will initially consist of a theory session held on a Friday evening followed by a practical session on the following Saturday afternoon where that new knowledge is put into action. We'll review the images made on the following Tuesday evening. Class sizes will be kept to a maximum of 12 people, and the cost of the beginners' session will be \$80, including a film and processing.

A bit of a shock in the industry

In the last week of August, one of the photography industry's best known film manufacturers announced it was no longer solvent and put itself into the hands of the receivers. Ilford, a British company best known for their B&W films and their "Ilfochrome" paper, announced it was no longer able to keep making film due to worse-than-expected sales.

Ouch! The world's second biggest B&W film maker can't make ends meet, so shock waves have been going around the internet about the impending demise of all film-based photography! I don't think that will happen any time soon, but my choices of film are more than likely going to diminish faster than I'd prefer. I'm not looking forward to the time when I'll need to fork out \$50,000 to get the quality digital camera I'll need when colour "sheet" film gets scarce.

(Perhaps it's time for me to start hoarding film mmmm ... how am I going to pay for that?)

Hey, anybody out there want to buy a picture from the Goldfields? I know this bloke who takes some pretty good shots and he has this gallery ☺

Photo of the Month

This month our shot comes from the mullock dumps of the Superpit. It was inspired by the shots we often see of Uluru, with the rock under a stormy red sky. To me, the waste dumps from KCGM's operations are reminiscent of the forms of natural landscapes from central Australia, so I have been looking for a shot that shows that. I hope you like it.

(If you didn't receive the print with the newsletter, it will be because you haven't subscribed yet. There are two ways to subscribe – buy any landscape print from us or send us your details and \$29.50 for a year's subscription.)

That's it for September's newsletter. I wish I could say I had fun writing it, but with a dead computer sitting at the digital doctor's, it wasn't as much fun as I would have liked. Anyway, I hope you enjoyed reading it, and I hope you get the chance to take some photos of your own this month – September is the best month in the goldfields if you ask me.

Cheers,
Graeme and Michelle Hird.

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