

Shoot for the Moon

Monthly news and tips from
Landscape Photographer
Gill Moon



November 2020 Vol 11 - All about light

Hello

and welcome to the November edition of 'Shoot for the Moon'

The image above was taken on a shoot at Iken at the start of this week. I had gone there hoping for a beautiful sunrise but the bank of cloud on the horizon put pay to any vibrant colours and until the sun peaked above the clouds the landscape looked a little flat. It got me thinking about light, the essence of all landscape photography, and how we can use this to the best of our abilities to create the images that we want to make. So this months newsletter is all about light.

Remember to aim high, be inspired and shoot for the moon!

Thank you and happy photographing

Gill

If you would like to get in touch please email me at gill@gillmoon.com

Light in landscape photography



This image was taken on the banks of the River Ore just after sunrise. The sun is situated to the right of the image casting some lovely difused light across the scene.

Shooting Info: Nikon D850, 24-70mm lens at 44mm. F16 at 5.5 seconds, ISO 100. 0.6 ND graduated filter and 6 stop ND filter.

The word photography is derived from the Greek photos (“light”) and graphe (“drawing”). It literally means drawing with light.

The two most important elements to creating a successful image are composition and lighting. As landscape photographers our choice of composition is entirely within our control but we cannot control the light as we might if we were working in a studio. We have no control over the sun, the amount of cloud in the sky or the quality of the light at any given time. As a result we have to learn to work with the conditions we are presented with when we are out in the landscape.

To do this we can plan our shoots to make the most of the golden light at either end of the

day, we can consider our orientation in relation to the sun and we can plan for the variety of weather conditions that nature can throw at us. There are plenty of apps and online resources to help us do this and I have listed a few at the end of the newsletter. But however hard we plan we won’t always be able to predict the light at any given time se we need to be aware of how light affects our images and how to work with it to achieve the best results.

The key factors to take into account when thinking about the lighting for your images are:

Where is the light coming from? With landscape photography our light source is the sun so we need to think theorientation of the sun in relation to our scene.

The angle of the light - is the sun high in the sky or low down. Low angled light will exaggerate textures and shadows and will have a softer quality to it.

The colour of the light - are you shooting at midday, at sunrise, sunset, twilight or after dark.

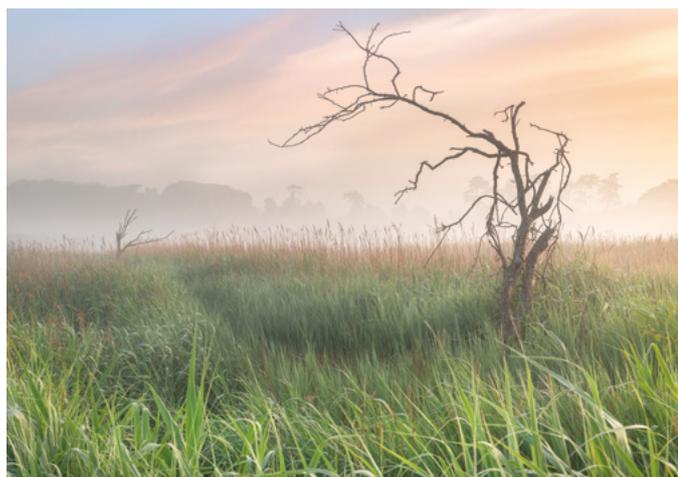
When thinking about your composition and the overall mood of your image ask yourself whether there is a better time of day to take the shot. The mood of an image will depend so much on the quality of the light.

Orientation to the sun

This is one of the most important factors when considering the light and it will make a massive difference to your image. Changing your position in relation to the sun will allow you to shoot using side lighting, front light, or back light. All three will give a different look and feel to your image as they all have a particular effect on the landscape.

Side light

Side lighting is great for emphasising texture, shadows, shape and form in the landscape. It is one of my favourite uses of light and is often how my images are composed.



This image was taken on the marsh at Ramsholt. The sunlight was coming in from the right hand side emphasising the shadows between the two trees. Shooting Info: Nikon D850, 24-70mm lens at 46mm. F15 at 1/5 second. ISO 100. 0.6 ND grad filter.

Side lighting works particularly well just after sunrise when the light is low in the sky and gives a really soft feel to your images. The cover image was taken just after sunrise and the effect that the sun made just in the space of 5 minutes was striking. The next two images show how important the light is in landscape photography - it just makes the image come alive. If the light is not good it will have a dramatic effect on the success of your image.



This image was taken at Iken just before the sun rose above the bank of cloud on the horizon. The light in the image is really flat, and there is no warmth to the picture. Shooting Info: Nikon D850, 24-70mm lens at 50mm. F14 at 0.3 second, ISO 100, 0.6 ND grad filter.



This image was taken about 5 minutes after the one above it. The sun has broken through the cloud bank and is lighting up the scene from the side. The picture comes alive with the light and is much more successful than the first image. Shooting Info: Nikon D850, 24-70mm lens at 65mm. F14 at 1/8 second, ISO 100, 0.6 ND grad filter.

Back light

Using back light involves shooting into the sun and is typically used at sunrise and sunset. This method of using the light results in dramatic images full of contrast, an element which can be difficult to manage. The most common method of using back lighting is at sunrise and sunset. Here ND graduated filters are used to help manage the contrast between the bright sunlight and the darker foreground.



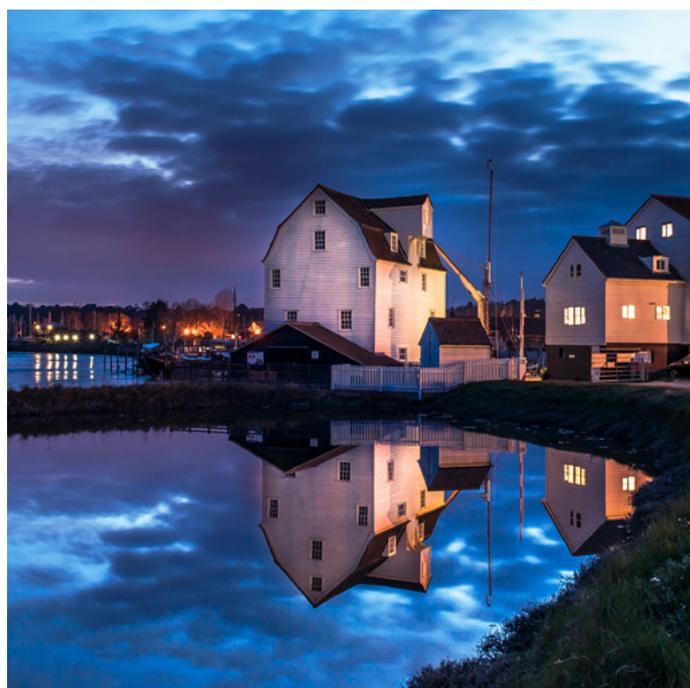
This image was taken at Bawdsey Quay at sunset. Shooting Info: Nikon D850, 24-70mm lens at 24mm. F16 at 1/5 second, ISO 100, 0.9ND grad filter.

If you spend time shooting at sunrise or sunset you will notice that the colour of the light changes as the sun rises or sets. The golden hour which refers to the period of time when the sun is low in the sky can reveal some of the best light of the day. But it is also worth shooting in the blue hour which refers to the period of time directly before sunrise or after sunset.

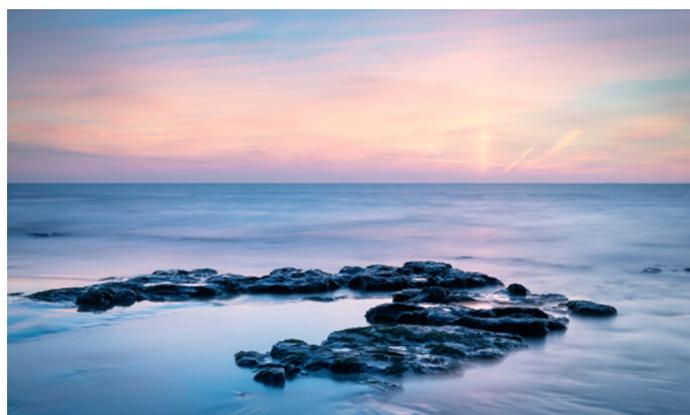
When the sun reaches six degrees below the horizon, it is no longer directly illuminating the ground, but it is illuminating the upper atmosphere. During this time red light which has a longer wavelength than blue light passes through the atmosphere into space whilst the blue light is diffused and scattered. This will give your image a cold blue feel which can be quite beautiful. In the morning blue hour starts

about 30 mins before the sun rises and in the evening about 15 minutes after the sun has set.

I don't do a lot of shooting in the blue hour because I don't always like the blue cast but there are some situations where it looks quite striking. You change the temperature of the white balance to counteract this effect but then I think you lose some of the appeal of shooting at this time of day.



This image was taken at Woodbridge Tidemill just after sunset during the blue hour. Shooting Info: Nikon D700, 24-70mm lens at 31mm. F9 at 18 seconds, ISO 200



This image was taken on the coast at Bawdsey about half an hour before sunrise. Shooting Info: Nikon D850, 24-70mm lens at 42mm. F11 at 34seconds, ISO 400, 0.9ND graduated filter, 6 stop ND filter.



This image was taken on the coast at Bawdsey about 25 mins after the previous image. Shooting Info: Nikon D850, 24-70mm lens at 26mm. F14 at 13 seconds, ISO 400. 0.6 ND graduated filter, 6 stop ND filter.

This image above was taken about 10 minutes after the previous shot and you can see how much the colour temperature has changed and warmed in that time.

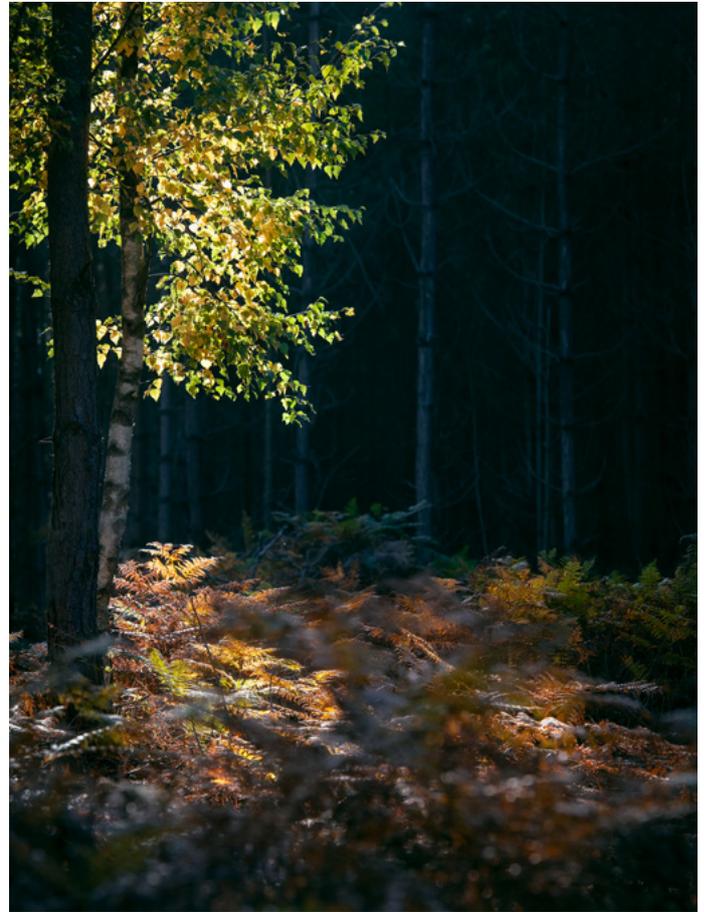
Using backlight for smaller scenes

One of the most successful ways to use back lighting is in smaller scenes particularly when working with trees, leaves and plants.

The next image was taken in Rendlesham Forest. It was the light catching the leaves of the silver birch that initially caught my eye and the contrast between the yellows and golds and the dark background generated by the pine trees.

When thinking about how to take this image I decide that the shot was all about the light as opposed to the actual subject matter. So to accentuate this I decided to slightly underexpose the image rendering most of the background dark and focusing all the viewers attention onto the light in the silver birch tree and the ferns below it.

In post processing I darkened down the shadows a little in the background and around the bottom edge of the image and I also reduced the saturation a little particularly in the silver birch which I thought was a bit overpowering.



This image was taken in Rendlesham Forest. Shooting Info: Nikon D850, 70-200mm lens at 125mm. F5.6 at 1/125 second, ISO 100. Polarising filter.

Using backlight to create Bokeh in an image

The word Bokeh comes from the Japanese word Boke meaning blur. Essentially it is the term used to describe out of focus highlights in an image.

To achieve good bokeh you will need a fast lens of at least F2.8 - prime lenses are really good for achieving this effect. You will need to shoot with the lens wide open and create a good distance between your subject and its background.

Arrange your composition so that you are shooting into the light. Select the widest aperture possible and a long focal length you should achieve some good results.



This image was shot into the sun on a frosty morning. The thawing frost on the branches of the tree created some lovely bokeh from the out of focus highlights. Shooting info: Nikon 24-70mm lens at 70mm, F2.8 at 1/1600 second, ISO 400, handheld.



This image was shot into the sun after a night of rain. The bokeh was formed from the out of focus raindrops on the grass. Shooting Info: Nikon D850, 70-200mm lens, F3.2 at 1/640 seconds, ISO 100

When taking both these images I have pushed the exposure to the right as far as possible to create a light and airy feel. In post processing I have then tweaked the exposure as far as I can without blowing any highlights and have also lightened the shadows and the blacks. My overall aim for both images was to achieve a light bright feel with a joyful mood.

Front light

Pointing the camera directly away from the sun is described as using front lighting. This can give your landscapes a very flat look because the direction of light will mean the shadows are always hidden resulting in a lack of texture and shape. Front lighting does however emphasise the colours in an image.

The image below is a good example of a front lit image. It was taken at Pin Mill about 10am. The shadows in the image are very short and there is not a huge amount of contrast within the image. The colours are bright but the shot lacks the depth that you would get from side lighting. Without the prominent foreground this image probably wouldn't have worked at all.



Shooting info: Nikon D850, 24-70mm lens at 24mm, F11 at 1/160 second at ISO 100.

Notes on time of day

Shooting at the beginning and end of the day during the golden hours will give warm images full of atmosphere. Shooting in the midday sun has a tendency to give high contrast and stark shadows and a much

harsher feel to your images.

Diffused light

I love working with diffused light. It is generated on dull overcast days, when the weather is foggy or drizzly. It is not the usual weather that would inspire landscape photography but it is great for woodland work and for creating atmospheric moody images.

These conditions can be a challenge to shoot in as there is not much contrast and you have to be aware of how your camera sensor records the world to get the best results.

Your camera sees the world in shades of grey. As there is not much contrast available in misty conditions the camera tends to underexpose. To ensure that you don't end up with a murky looking image try to add in some positive exposure compensation. Use the histogram and expose to the right as far as you can without blowing any of the highlights.

When you come to post process misty images you may find that they work really well in black and white as high key landscapes.

In the image of Snape Maltings below I wanted to keep the colour in the shot as the sun was just adding enough warmth to the scene to make it interesting.



Shooting Info: Nikon D850, 24-70mm lens at 32mm, F16 at 1/13 second, ISO 100. 0.6 ND graduated filter.

In the image below the mist was too thick for there to be any significant colour in the scene so I chose a high key black and white conversion adding some negative vignetting to the edges to make the tree feel isolated in the mist.



The Witness Tree, part of my Grounded project. Shooting Info: Nikon D850, 70-200mm lens at 70mm. F7.1 at 1/400 second, ISO 800 handheld.

Moonlight

Moonlight can provide some very interesting photo opportunities but it can be quite tricky to get good shots.

If you are going out in the dark doing some planning before your shoot will increase your chances of getting a good shot. Visit your chosen location in the day light and work out your composition. Use an app like Photo Pills or the Photographers Ephemeris to work out what time the moon will rise and where it will appear in the sky.

When it comes to choosing your camera settings you will need to use a higher ISO than you would usually use for landscape photography. You will need to balance this with your aperture settings - I would work between F5.6 and F11 and try and keep your ISO as low as you can without having really lengthy exposure times. If the moon is visible in your shot you need to be aware that a long exposure time will show the movement of the moon through the sky and will change its shape from a perfect sphere.



Shooting Info: Nikon D700, 70-300mm lens at 140mm, F6.3 at 1/5 second, ISO 200

This shot was taken at Sizewell and shows a super moon just edging out from behind the clouds. It was taken in November about 5pm so there was still a fair amount of blue light in the atmosphere. Because it wasn't properly dark it was relatively easy to balance the exposure to make sure that I retained some detail in the moon as well as on the platform in the sea.

The following shot was taken much later in the evening at about 11pm. Fortunately the moon was blanketed by some thin cloud which really helped the exposure and ensure that the moon didn't get too burnt out. To help balance the shot I used a 0.9ND graduated filter.



Shooting Info: Nikon D850, 24-70mm lens at 24mm, F8 at 92 seconds, ISO 500. Manual mode with a remote cable release and a 0.9ND graduated filter.

The trick with moonlight photography is to get the best balance between the brightness of the moon and the darkness of the landscape. In the field it is best to expose to the left a little to retain some of the secrecy of night time but to make sure that your subject is lit just enough that it captures the viewers attention.

When processing this image I made sure that there was some detail visible in the sky but I kept the background deliberately dark. I adjusted the shadows in the wreck only and brought out some of the highlights and colour detail in the wood and on the surface of the water.

When shooting images like this I really prefer using only the natural light of the moon but you can try light painting your foreground subject for just a few seconds while the shutter is open. An ordinary torch is perfect and you don't need to shine it for very long for it to have an effect.



Shooting Info: Nikon D850, 24-70mm lens at 24mm, F8 at 35 seconds, ISO 500. Manual mode with a remote cable release and a 0.9ND graduated filter.

The image above was taken using a few seconds of light painting to illuminate the wreck. The artificial light has brought out the colours in the old wood and has given the wreck a ghostly feel but I prefer the overall exposure and atmosphere achieved with the natural light of the moon.

All the moonlight shots discussed above have

been taken with the moon providing the light source from in front of the camera - they are essentially using back light.

Shooting with the moon behind you will give you enough light to illuminate the landscape but it should also allow you to shoot the stars without the brightness of the moon in your image.

When shooting starts you will need to be aware that if your exposure time is too long then you will start to get star trails in your image where the movement of the earth becomes apparent and the stars start to streak. To overcome this you can use the 500 rule which provides a guide for the maximum exposure time for the focal length of your lens. Basically the rule says that:

Shutter speed = Focal length x crop factor.
Where a full frame has a crop factor of 1
Canon and Nikon APS sensors have a crop factor of 1.6 Canon and 1.5 Nikon
Micro four thirds have a crop factor of 2

So if you are using a 24mm focal length on a full frame camera the maximum shutter speed before star trails will begin to show is
 $500 / (24 \times 1) = 20$ seconds

The following shot was taken at East Lane, Bawdsey. It was principally a shot of the house on the edge of the cliff under a starry sky. There was enough light from the moon to illuminate the house and the land around it. The colours in the distance are generated from the light pollution from the port of Felixstowe.

This shot was taken at an ISO of 6400 with the aperture wide open at 2.8. This gave me a shutter speed of 1.2 seconds but the image was rather grainy. It would have been much better to have decreased the ISO and increased the shutter speed a little. This would have given me a better quality image in terms of noise.



Shooting Info: Nikon D850, 24-70mm lens at 24mm. F2.8 at 1.2 seconds, ISO 6400

Apps to help you work with the light

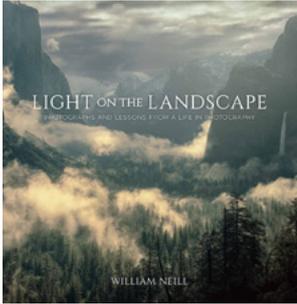
Photo Pills is a photography planning app. It allows you to plan your shot in advance showing you the direction and angle of sunrise, sunset, moonrise and set and the location of the milky way.

www.photopills.com

The Photographers Ephemeris is another photo planning app which will allow you to track the direction of the sun and moon at any time of the day. There is a new 3D version of this app which allows you to see how the light falls across the land.

www.photoephemeris.com

Inspiration



Light on the Landscape by William Neill

This lovely new book offers an insight into the photographic work of American Photographer William Neill. It features some beautiful images and an insight into his creative process.

To see more of William's images visit his website:
www.portfolios.williamneill.com

Novembers challenge

This months challenge is all about light. November can be a month of really varied weather and light and as such offers some great photographic opportunities. Here are a few ideas to get your creativity flowing.

Take the following images:

1. An image using backlight - this can be taken at any time of the day.

2. A close detail highlighting the use of Bokeh
3. An image using sidelight

I am really happy to offer feedback and would love to see your images so please get in touch
gill@gillmoon.com



The Suffolk 50-50 Exhibition



Gill Moon



Richard Tricker



Phil Lenney



Shelagh Allen



Simon Gooderham



Zoe Harris

Online Photo Exhibition 14th - 30th November

50 Photographs - 50 Years - 1 Unique Landscape

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Suffolk Coast & Heaths

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

Showcasing photographs from:

Gill Moon - Pat Ainger - Shelagh Allen

Angela Chalmers - Simon Gooderham - Zoe Harris

Phil Lenney - Rosey Nicholls - Hillas Smith

Tim Stott - Richard Tricker

www.gillmoon.com/suffolk-50-50



Pat Ainger



Rosey Nicholls



Tim Stott



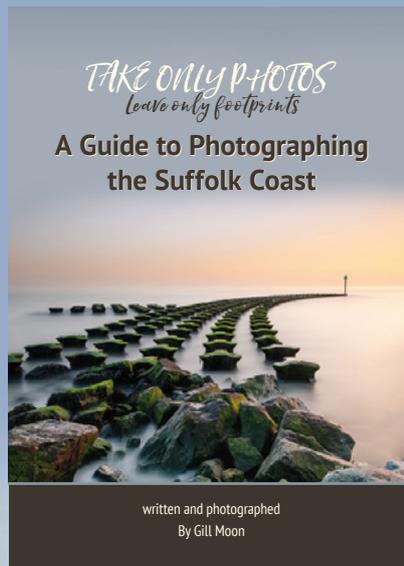
Angela Chalmers



Hillas Smith

Suffolk Guides from Gill Moon Photography

£8



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