LIGHT IN THE LANDSCAPE

ABOUT

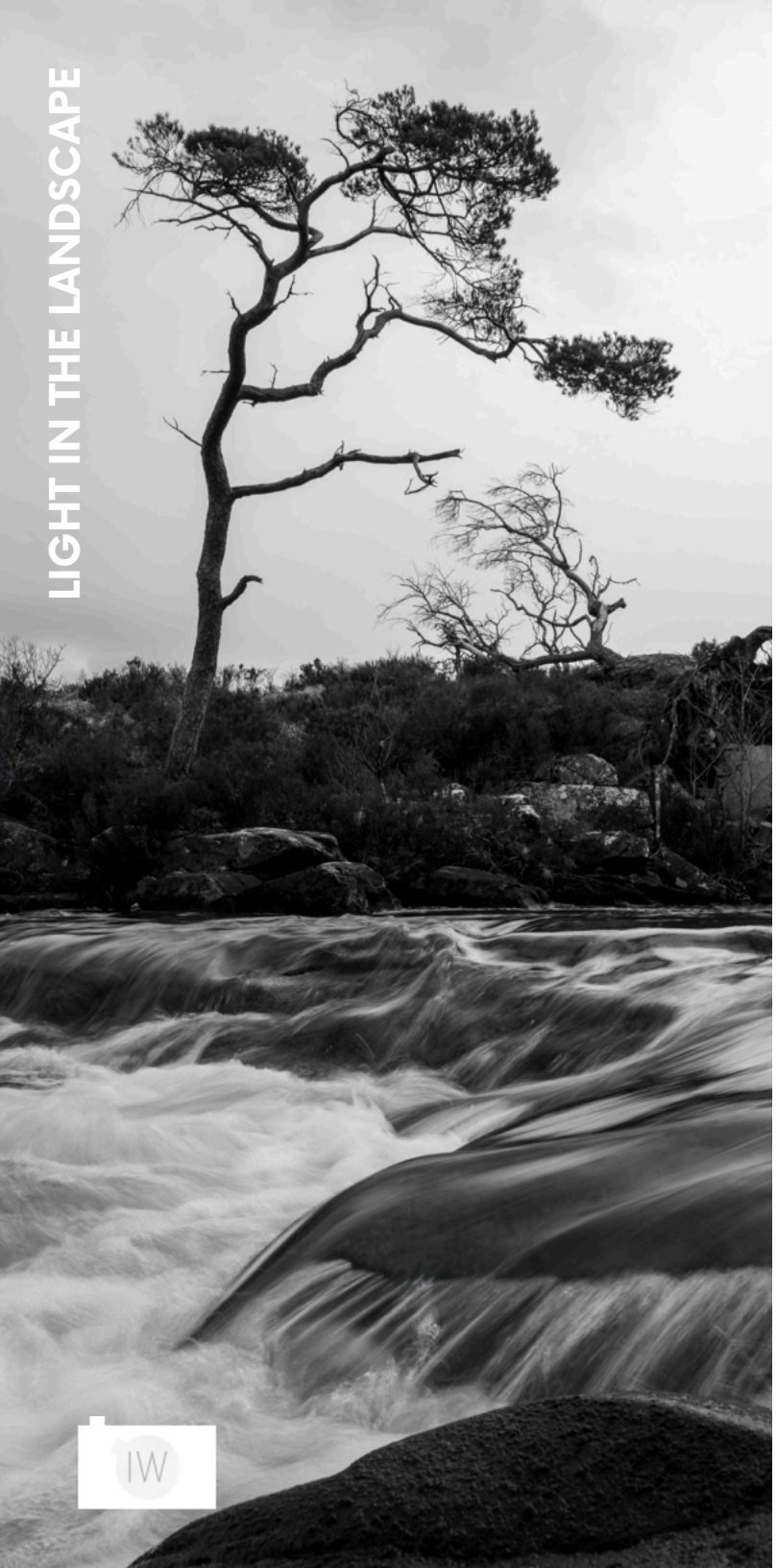
Welcome to my guide “light in the landscape” I'm glad you're here.

Light is such an important part of photography, and I hope this guide helps you to create amazing images.

In many of my YouTube videos, you might hear me say, "the light is poor" or "the light isn't great right now."
What I really mean is that I haven't found the right subject for the current lighting conditions. This is a key lesson: there are always photos to be taken in all types of light. We just need to match the subject to the light.

In this guide, we'll talk about different types of light and how to work with them. Whether it's the warm light of the golden hour, the soft light of the blue hour, or the harsh light of midday, each offers unique opportunities. Let's explore these together and find ways to make the most of whatever light we have.

IAN WORTH



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guide is to encourage you to explore the landscape, no matter the conditions. Whether you use this guide as a bedtime read or an in-the-field companion, I hope it inspires you. The PDF format is perfect for saving to your phone, so you can easily access it for a burst of inspiration the next time you're out on a photography adventure.

2:THE NATURE OF LIGHT

Light is something we encounter every day, but we often take it for granted. For photographers, light is one of the most crucial elements because, without it, there would be no photographs.

To understand light better, let's touch on some basic science.

Light is a form of energy that travels in waves. These waves are part of the electromagnetic spectrum, which includes other types of waves like radio waves, microwaves, and X-rays. Unlike sound waves, light waves can travel through the vacuum of space, which is why we can see sunlight even though space is a vacuum.

The light we see with our eyes is just a small part of the electromagnetic spectrum, known as visible light. This visible light is made up of different colors, each with its own wavelength. The colours range from red, which has the longest wavelength, to violet, which has the shortest. When the range of colours combine, they create white light.

Understanding the properties of light, such as its colour and intensity, helps us as photographers to make better decisions about how to capture our subjects.

Different times of day and weather conditions can affect the colour and quality of light, and learning to see these changes is the first step to mastering light in landscape photography.

3: THE GOLDEN HOUR

GOLD

The golden hour is a special time for photographers. It refers to the period shortly after sunrise and just before sunset when the light is soft, warm, and often golden in color. This time of day offers unique lighting conditions that can transform ordinary scenes into incredible ones.

GOLDEN HOUR

The golden hour happens because the sun is low in the sky, causing its light to travel through more of the Earth's atmosphere. This diffuses the light, making it less harsh and more flattering for photography. The exact timing of the golden hour varies depending on your location and the time of year, but it generally lasts about an hour after sunrise and an hour before sunset. Golden hour light is prized for its warmth and softness. The low angle of the sun creates long shadows and highlights textures beautifully. The warm tones can add a happy and joyful feel to your photos, making them visually appealing.

TECHNIQUES FOR CAPTURING THE GOLDEN HOUR

To make the most of the golden hour, you'll want to use the right camera settings. While settings for the exposure triangle will vary from scene to scene, one tip is to set your white balance to either "shade" or "cloudy." The camera's auto white balance will try to neutralize the golden light, whereas "cloudy," on the other hand, will accentuate the golden tones. Shooting in RAW will give you the option to change the white balance in post-production.

COMPOSITION TIPS

The golden hour is perfect for experimenting with different compositions. Use the warm light to highlight your subject and create depth in your photos. Pay attention to the direction of the light and how it casts shadows. Side lighting can add texture and dimension, while backlighting can create amazing silhouettes.

Use backlight to create silhouettes

PLANNING AND TIMING

Planning is key to making the most of the golden hour. Use apps or websites to find the exact times of sunrise and sunset for your location.

Consider arriving early to scout your location and set up your gear. Be prepared to shoot quickly, as the light changes rapidly during this time.

A couple of apps I use for preparing for a golden hour shoot are Viewfinder, which predicts golden clouds and afterglow; Clear Outside, for weather information; and PhotoPills, for showing where the sun will set or rise during the golden Hour.

4: THE BLUE HOUR

The blue hour occurs twice a day, during the twilight periods before sunrise and after sunset. During this time, the sun is below the horizon, and the indirect sunlight takes on a blue hue, giving the landscape a characteristic color. The duration of the blue hour can vary based on your location and the time of year, usually lasting about 20 to 40 minutes.
Blue hour light is known for its cool tones and soft, diffused quality. The absence of direct sunlight means there are no harsh shadows, and the light is even and gentle. This can create a calm and serene atmosphere in your photos. The deep blue colour can add a sense of mystery and tranquility to your images.

TECHNIQUES

To capture the blue hour effectively, you'll be working with low light. A slow shutter speed may be inevitable, so to avoid raising the ISO too much, I recommend using a tripod. This will help you avoid camera shake and ensure sharp images. Similar to the golden hour, setting your camera to auto white balance will likely neutralise the blue colours. Consider setting the white balance to daylight to retain those blue hues. Additionally, shooting in RAW will give you more flexibility during post-production.

When composing your blue hour shots, look for scenes with interesting shapes. The soft, even light is perfect for capturing reflections in water, and landscapes with distinctive outlines.

Planning is essential for blue hour photography, especially at sunrise when you will likely arrive in total darkness. Since the blue hour is relatively short, having a clear plan will help you make the most of this fleeting time. I prefer to scout a location prior to the shoot if I plan to arrive in the dark.

INCLUDING ELEMENTS LIKE BUILDINGS OR NATURAL FEATURES CAN ADD DEPTH AND INTEREST TO YOUR PHOTOS.

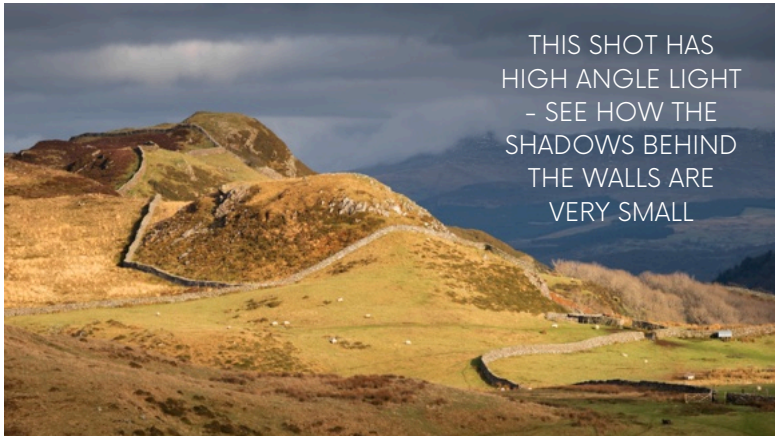
5: THE ANGLE OF LIGHT

UNDERSTANDING LIGHT ANGLES

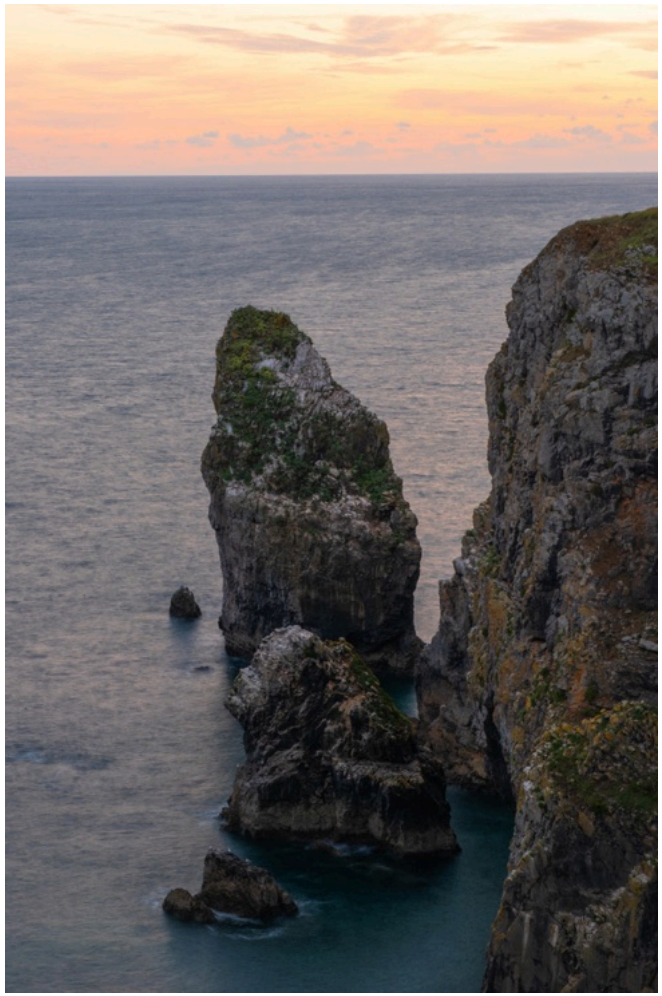
Light angles play a crucial role in photography. The angle at which light hits your subject can dramatically change the look and feel of your images. By understanding and using different light angles, you can enhance the mood, texture, and details of your photos.

HIGH ANGLE VS LOW ANGLE

A high-angle light source, like the midday sun, shines directly down on your subject. This can sometimes result in harsh, unflattering light. On the other hand, a low-angle light source, such as the sun during sunrise or sunset, creates a softer, more diffused light. Low-angle light is often more flattering for landscape photos.



THIS SHOT HAS HIGH ANGLE LIGHT - SEE HOW THE SHADOWS BEHIND THE WALLS ARE VERY SMALL



2 VERY DIFFERENT PHOTOS FROM THE SAME SPOT SHOWING HOW THE ANGLE OF LIGHT CAN INFLUENCE A SCENE

FLAT, HIGH ANGLE LIGHT CASTS VERY MINIMAL SHADOWS

IMPACT OF SHADOWS AND HIGHLIGHTS

The angle of light affects the placement and intensity of shadows and highlights. High-angle light creates minimal shadows and can cause highlights to be very bright, which may blow out details on reflective surfaces such as water and snow. Low-angle light, however, casts longer shadows, which can enhance the three-dimensional quality of your photos. This type of lighting is great for emphasising textures and bringing out the details in your landscape shots.

TECHNIQUES FOR UTILISING LIGHT ANGLES

When shooting with high-angle light, try to use the shadows creatively. Position your subject in a way that the shadows add interest to the composition. In harsh midday light, consider finding intimate scenes in the shade as this will soften the light on your subject.
For low-angle light, take advantage of the long shadows to create depth. Position your subject so that the light skims across the surface, enhancing textures and adding a sense of dimension. This technique is especially effective for vistas, where the low light can highlight the contours of the terrain.

LOW ANGLE LIGHT ADDS RAKING SHADOWS ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE

THIS WAS SHOT IN THE EARLY AFTERNOON, I MANAGED TO FIND SOME SHADE FROM THE HARSH SUNLIGHT

6: THE DIRECTION OF LIGHT

Understanding the direction of light is essential in photography. Different directions of light can create various moods and effects in your images. Here are the main types of light directions you will encounter:

FRONT LIGHT

Front light occurs when the light source is directly in front of your subject. This type of lighting illuminates the subject evenly, reducing shadows and creating a flat appearance. It's great for capturing details when shadows become distracting, but can sometimes make the image look less dynamic.

SIDE LIGHT

Side light comes from the side of your subject, creating strong shadows and highlights. This type of lighting adds depth and dimension to your photos, emphasising textures and shapes. It's perfect for creating a dramatic effect.

BACK LIGHT

Back light happens when the light source is behind your subject. This type of lighting can produce beautiful, artistic images with strong contrast between light and dark areas. It's ideal for creating a sense of mystery or highlighting the outline of your subject, it's also great for creating silhouettes in the landscape.

TOP LIGHT

Top light shines directly down on your subject from above. This type of lighting can create harsh but small shadows. However, it can be used creatively to either reduce shadows that would otherwise be distracting or to accentuate crepuscular rays that shine through the clouds. Crepuscular rays form when sunlight passes through gaps in clouds or other obstacles, such as mountains. These gaps create beams of light that are visible against the darker background of the sky and can create amazing photos.

PROS & CONS

Front Light:
Pros: Even illumination, good for details.
Cons: Can make images look flat and less dynamic.

Side Light:
Pros: Adds depth, texture, and drama.
Cons: Can create very strong shadows, which might be too harsh.

Back Light:
Pros: Creates artistic silhouettes and highlights.
Cons: Can make the main subject too dark if not handled properly.

Top Light:
Pros: Great for crepuscular rays on cloudy days
Cons: Highlights can easily become overexposed.

7: THE QUALITY OF LIGHT

The quality of light is a crucial aspect of photography. It refers to the nature of the light itself, whether it is harsh or diffused. Understanding and working with different light qualities can significantly impact your photos, bringing out textures, setting the mood, and enhancing the overall atmosphere.

THIS WAS SHOT JUST AFTER SUNSET - THIS IS REFERRED TO AS AFTERGLOW.

HARSH LIGHT VS. DIFFUSED LIGHT

HARSH LIGHT

Harsh light is strong and direct, often creating sharp shadows and bright highlights. This type of light is typically found during midday when the sun is high in the sky. While not impossible to work with, it can be challenging for the landscape photographer especially during summer when the sun is particularly high in the sky.

HARSH LIGHT

HARSH LIGHT

HARSH LIGHT VS. DIFFUSED LIGHT

DIFFUSED LIGHT

Diffused light is soft and even, spreading out in all directions. This type of light occurs on overcast days or when the sunlight is filtered through a thin layer of clouds, mist or fog. It minimises shadows and highlights, creating a gentle and flattering illumination.

DIFFUSED LIGHT

DIFFUSED LIGHT

CHARACTERISTICS AND EFFECTS

HARSH LIGHT CHARACTERISTICS

- Strong, direct illumination
- Sharp shadows
- High contrast between light and dark areas

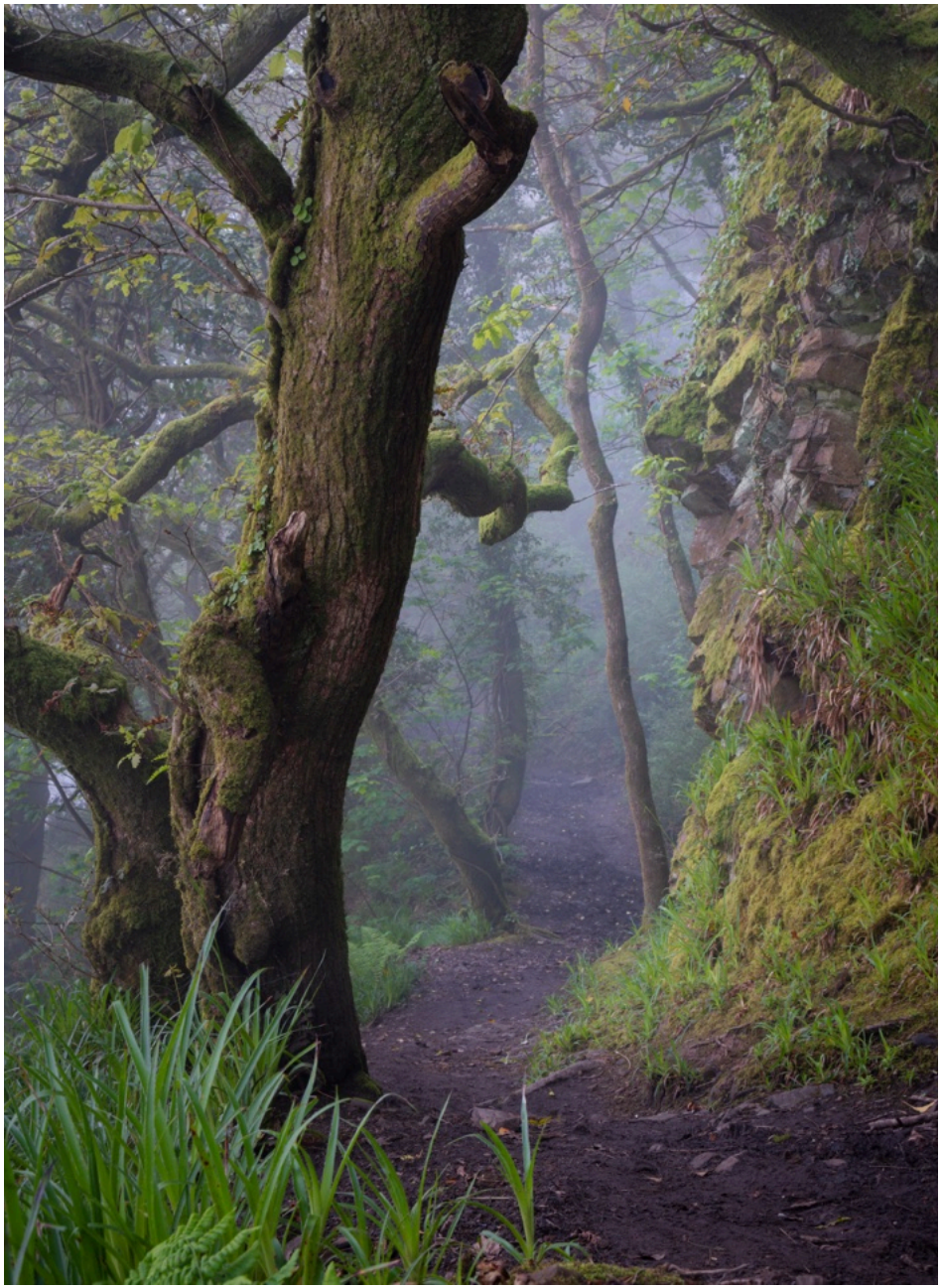
DIFFUSED LIGHT CHARACTERISTICS

- Soft, even illumination
- Minimal shadows
- Low contrast between light and dark areas

IAN'S TIP

IN DIFFUSED SOFT LIGHT, SHOOT WOODLAND AND WATERFALLS.

IN HARSH LIGHT, LOOK FOR SHADE AND FOCUS ON DETAILS



DIFFUSED LIGHT IS PERFECT FOR WOODLAND PHOTOGRAPHY

TECHNIQUES FOR WORKING WITH LIGHT QUALITY

We've talked about the two extremes: harsh and diffused light. However, there are many steps in between these extremes, and from my experience, this is where the best results can often be found.

For example, shadows that are slightly diffused can be great for a wide variety of shots. This allows us to better control highlight and shadow information and can often make the scene appear calmer. Sometimes, the best light can be found when the sun is low and a cloud just begins to lightly diffuse the light. We still get nicely defined shadows, but the transition is a little smoother and easier to control.

SOFT SHADOWS FROM SLIGHTLY DIFFUSED LIGHT

8: REFLECTED LIGHT

PERFECT FOR DETAILS

Reflected light plays a crucial role in landscape photography, offering a softer and more diffused illumination that enhances the natural beauty of a scene. Unlike direct sunlight, which can create harsh shadows and high contrast, reflected light—often bounced off surfaces like water, clouds, or nearby terrain—produces a more even and flattering distribution of light.

This type of lighting is particularly effective during golden hour, when the sun is low on the horizon, and its rays are scattered and reflected by the atmosphere, casting a warm, soft glow over the landscape.

Reflected light can bring out subtle textures, enhance colour saturation, and create a serene, natural mood that's perfect for capturing the intricate details and depth of outdoor scenes.

THE SETTING SUN REFLECTED OFF A CLIFF FACE WHICH CREATED A DEEP RED REFLECTION ON THE WET SAND

9: PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS IN THE FIELD

Combining Light Characteristics

Understanding light characteristics is one thing, but applying them in the field is where the magic happens. Combining different light qualities such as angle, direction, and quality can transform a simple scene into a stunning photograph.

By observing how these elements interact, you can capture the essence of a landscape in ways that evoke emotion and tell a story.

INTEGRATING ANGLE, DIRECTION, AND QUALITY

WHEN YOU'RE OUT IN THE FIELD, CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING ASPECTS:

- Angle: Think about the angle of the light source in relation to your subject. Low angles can create long, interesting shadows, while high angles might reduce shadows.
- Direction: The direction of the light, whether it's front, side, back, or top affects how shadows and highlights fall on your subject. Each direction has its unique characteristics that can enhance or diminish the features of your scene.
- Quality: The quality of light, whether harsh or diffused, plays a significant role in the mood and atmosphere of your photos. Diffused light can create a soft, gentle feel, while harsh light can add drama and contrast.

Combining these three elements thoughtfully, can help you make the most of any lighting situation and will often dictate what you shoot.

ADAPTING TO CHANGING CONDITIONS

Light conditions can change rapidly. Being flexible and ready to adapt is crucial. Here are a few tips:

- Stay Patient and Observant: Sometimes, waiting a few minutes can result in significantly better lighting as clouds move or the sun sets.
- Use Filters: polarizers can help manage contrast and reduce glare in various lighting conditions.
- Adjust Settings Quickly: Be familiar with your camera settings so you can quickly adapt to changing light. This includes adjusting ISO, aperture, and shutter speed on the fly.
- Plan Your Shoots: Use apps to determine the best times for lighting at your chosen location. Arriving early and staying late can give you opportunities to capture different light qualities.
- Scouting: When you are walking through the landscape try to pre visualise how the scene will change with different lighting conditions.

Don't be afraid to try new techniques and learn from the results. Experiment with different angles, directions, and qualities of light to see how they affect your photos.

10:BRACKETING PHOTOS AND DYNAMIC RANGE

Understanding Dynamic Range:

Dynamic range refers to the range of light intensities from the darkest shadows to the brightest highlights that a camera can capture in a single image. In landscape photography, we often encounter scenes with a wide dynamic range, such as a bright sky and a dark foreground. Capturing both ends of this range can be challenging, as some parts of the image might be overexposed while others are underexposed.

BRACKETING

WHAT IS BRACKETING?

Bracketing is a technique used to overcome the limitations of dynamic range in a single shot. It involves taking multiple photos of the same scene at different exposure settings. This way, you capture details in both the shadows and highlights, which can then be combined later in post-processing to create a balanced and well-exposed image.

- Set Up Your Camera:

Place your camera on a tripod or handhold and be very still, to ensure that all the bracketed shots align well. This is important for merging the photos later.

- Choose Your Exposure Bracketing Settings:

Most modern cameras have an auto exposure bracketing (AEB) feature. You can set your camera to take multiple shots (usually three to five) at different exposure levels. Typically, you'll take one photo at the correct exposure, one or two underexposed, and one or two overexposed.

- Take the Shots:

With your camera set up and settings in place, press the shutter button. Your camera will take the bracketed shots in quick succession.

COMBINING BRACKETED PHOTOS

- Once you have your bracketed shots, you can merge them in post-processing software like Adobe Lightroom or Photoshop.
- Import Your Photos: Import the bracketed photos into your chosen software.
- Merge to HDR: Use the HDR merge feature to combine the photos. The software will align and blend the images, balancing the exposure to create a final image that retains detail in both shadows and highlights.
- Fine-Tune: Adjust the merged image as needed. You can tweak the exposure, contrast, and other settings to achieve the desired look.

BENEFITS OF BRACKETING AND HDR

- Enhanced Detail: Bracketing allows you to capture details in both the darkest and brightest parts of the scene, which might be lost in a single exposure.
- Balanced Exposure: By merging the photos, you can create a balanced image that looks more like what your eyes see in real life.
- Flexibility in Post-Processing: Having multiple exposures gives you more flexibility in post-processing, enabling you to fine-tune the final image to your liking.

CONCLUSION

It's been a pleasure to share my insights and experiences, and I hope this guide has provided you with useful knowledge and inspiration for your photography endeavours.

We've explored many aspects of light, from the golden and blue hours to the nuances of light

Photography is a constantly evolving art form, and there's always more to learn. Embrace experimentation, and don't be discouraged by mistakes. Each shoot is an opportunity to refine your skills and develop your personal style. Challenging lighting conditions can often lead to creative breakthroughs.

One of the rewards of landscape photography is exploring the natural world. Whether you're capturing the majesty of a mountain range or the tranquillity of a forest, let the landscape inspire you. Be patient, observe the changing light, and immerse yourself in the environment. Some of the most memorable photos come from unexpected moments.

Keep seeking inspiration from fellow photographers, books, and other art forms. Join photography communities, share your work, and learn from others.

Every photographer has a unique perspective, and there's always something new to discover.

I hope this guide has been helpful.

Happy shooting,
Ian.

FURTHER RESOURCES BY IAN WORTH

- Learn the art of landscape photography composition -

120 page ebook: Visit: www.iworthphotos.com/store/composition-ebook

- Learn to edit amazing photos -

Editing masterclass & fortnightly editing sessions: Visit: www.iworthphotos.com/clubhouse-sign-up

- In the field teaching -

1 to 1 tuition & group photography tours: Visit: www.iworthphotos.com/workshops

- Landscape photography videos -

Follow along every week on YouTube: Visit: www.youtube.com/@ian_worth

- Photography inspiration -

Connect on instagram: Visit: www.instagram.com/@ian_worth