

The lockdown continues!

Here in the UK the lockdown continues due to the Covid-19 pandemic although there has been some easing of the restrictions – allowing us to make multiple trips outside the house to exercise. I have capitalised on that to go to the woodland area just a few hundred metres from my house to do some photography both for exercise – badly needed as I have gained 9lbs since going to the gym 3 days a week stopped and for a break from being almost a prisoner in my own home.

We are entering week nine now and it was initially advisable for all those over 70 should be shielded for at least 12 weeks but I can see that being extended!

It's also plain to see that the instructions given by our government are not headed by some of the community and this can only delay the process of being able to return to some new state of normality.

With places like hairdressers not being able to re-open before July, at the earliest, I can see that I'm going to be in desperate need by then!

I also miss my "coffee fix" that I like to get when I go into the village and I'm also going to miss out on my birthday celebration later this month – I'll have to get a rain check on that one!

It's frustrating to see our politicians blatantly lying about the situation regarding the deaths associated with this virus – particularly in care homes.

My wife, before she retired, was an administrator at quite a large privately owned care home and she is more than aware of the procedures that they would have had to put in place to protect both the residents and staff there.

What is unfolding is the sad fact that to create capacity in our hospitals for the anticipated need for intensive care beds was the fact that some elderly patients were being discharged back into the care homes before they had been checked for having the virus.

This led to the "seeding" of the virus amongst other residents and staff with the consequence that perhaps over 10,000 more deaths occurred through this directive.

I'm sure that in some point in the future there will be a public enquiry into how our government under Boris Johnson's leadership conducted themselves throughout this unprecedented pandemic.

So it looks like foreign travel is out for 2020 and I guess there will be a sudden demand for "staycation" holidays once travel restrictions are lifted and hotels are given the green light to re-open.

Maybe I will get a trip back to Arran later in the year I just wonder how many of the local shops – especially the cafes and tearooms in the villages will have survived as they do rely heavily on the influx of tourists from May to October.

How many jobs will have been lost during this period and will people have enough money to afford holidays when we get some form of normality back? I see this being a very long way back to the way we were in January of this year.

Out with the old and in with the new

You may recall that I purchased the Fujifilm X-T4 last month and I'm really pleased with how it performs. The learning curve was quite steep as the menu systems are not easy to follow as some of the Panasonic ones. They resemble the Olympus menus in some respect. Having made the decision to adopt this camera line I had to acknowledge the fact that I had a lot of photographic gear that just wasn't getting any attention.

First to go to the trade in market was the Panasonic G9.

This was a camera that I really did not get along with due to that very soft shutter button release.

Maybe it was just my way of shooting but when I'm waiting for a particular moment to happen I like to pre-focus and set exposure by half depressing the shutter button to lock the two ready for the moment when the final press of the button's travel was needed to capture the shot that I wanted.

I found it impossible to locate and hold the midway point. I did try back button focus method but again I did not find this a natural method.

So I got a good price for it as it was hardly used and all the accessories and original box was available to get the best price.

The next to go way the Panasonic GH3 – quite an old body that really hadn't seen any images taken in over a couple of years.

Then I turned my attention to my Canon camera bodies. The 70D and 80D were quickly cleaned and sent for appraisal at one of the UK's biggest second hand camera stores.

They offered a fair price so they too were sold on.

As I have adopted the Olympus OMD -EM1 Mk2 as my go to camera I decided that the Canon lenses that didn't really fit my current needs should also be part exchanged for new glass of the Fuji system. I also had the Olympus OMD EM5-mk2 valued but the trade in price was way too low so I'll be holding onto that a little longer.

So my push-pull Canon 100-400mm IS USM series 1 lens went and in its place the 100-400mm Fuji lens was acquired.

I still have a way to go in rationalising my kit. Probably the two remaining Panasonic M4/3 bodies will go to Ebay in the near future. The lenses, of course, being able to be used with the Olympus system.



I will keep my full frame Canon 5D mk3 as the images from it are just superb if you want that really shallow DOF that you get from F1.4/F2.8 lenses.
The 90D also deserves a place until the EOS M50 mk2 arrives – hopefully later in the year. All the Canon glass stays as with active adaptors I can use them on both the Olympus, Canon EOS M and Fujifilm camera bodies.

All my bridge cameras will stay as I frequently refer to them to answer your questions about set up and errors etc.



As worldwide camera sales are falling and Olympus has just announce it is closing its camera business in South Korea it is really time to sit down an make a road map for the future.

Micro four thirds adds the advantage of size and weight reduction plus the 2X crop factor means lenses can reach 800mm which is ideal for wildlife shots.

Olympus have been struggling to up their market share of the mirrorless camera market. This is currently led by the Canon EOS M50 and I'm sure when the Mk2 comes out it will also climb up the rankings of camera sales. I made an early prediction that the M50 would be a camera to watch and this is very much the case, even today.



The Panasonic Lumix FZ80/82 Revisited



If you follow my YouTube channel you will have seen that I have been running a new series looking at the FZ80/82.

I've done this for a couple of reasons.

Firstly, the video tutorial series is still receiving the highest number of current video views and sales of the user's guide are still fairly good at about 10 copies a week.

I still get lots of emails asking for help with the camera as a lot of new users get frustrated at the poor images that the camera can deliver if you are not aware of its shortcomings.



An example of the terrific image quality that can be achieved with the FZ80/82 with a little care.

To some degree it is very much like the FZ100 when it first made an appearance. It too was a camera that needed a lot of careful understanding especially if you had had a previous camera like the FZ38 which delivered really good out of camera images.

The FZ100 with a switch to CMOS sensor proved rather less accommodating to poor exposure and shooting in low light.

Once you learned how to work on its weaknesses it could produce quite acceptable results.



At 135mm EFL image sharpness is excellent



At 20mm EFL wide angle setting it is very good for landscapes

Where the camera does fail is when it is used at the longest zoom setting of 1200mm EFL. Also when in the fully auto mode it has the option to zoom to 2400mm (utilising digital zoom). This really compounds the image quality issues. Not only do atmospheric conditions affect the image – particularly things like heat haze over land or water but the lens suffers some loss of sharpness at the fully zoomed position.



At full zoom you have to keep ISO at the lowest setting, use a fast shutter speed and chose a cool day to be able to capture distant views.



When light levels are low, which would need increasing the ISO to capture the scene, switching to a diffused flash light source is a good alternative. Here the higher powered TT685o flash gun from Godox is being triggered by a simple wireless trigger.

Infrared Photos



With all the new green foliage on trees at the moment I remembered how great these create infrared photographs where green becomes bright white, like snow.. I have recently converted a Canon Powershot SX220 (never again!) travel zoom to shoot infrared images and so this was an ideal opportunity in the bright sunlight to test it out.

It was a difficult conversion as Canon actually epoxy resin the sensor backplate to the plastic surrounding after it has been installed. Releasing the sensor was quite difficult and not something that could be considered as an easy conversion. The earlier Panasonic travel zooms like the TZ6 are far easier to convert.

Dealing with large filters

I've always advocated buying filters to suit the largest diameter lens that you have and then using step up rings to fit them to smaller lens diameters.

This is especially the case with some of the variable neutral density filters that can often cost quite a lot of money.

Now this has always worked fine except with the FZ80/82 as its wide angle the 20mm lens is very unforgiving on anything screwed into the lens thread. It will take the standard 55mm thin filters without vignette but trying to use step up rings causes vignette.

I found a solution by using a larger diameter flange that is normally used to attach a ring flash LED light and supergluing a step down ring onto it to accept the size of filter. In my case it is a 72mm filter so I used a 77 to 72mm step down ring.

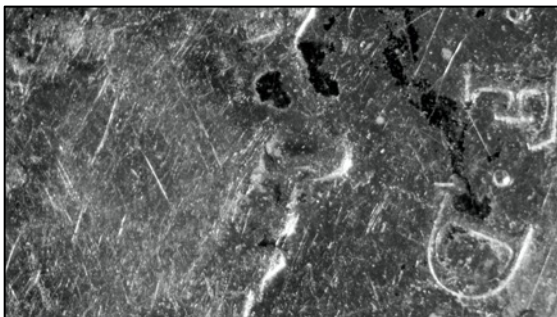


The modification allowing the use of my 72mm Freewell variable ND filter on the FZ82

To Infinity and beyond!



Having a little more “free-time” I thought that I would try to learn more about extreme macro and macro focus stacking. A few years back I bought a set of bellows for the Canon EF cameras so I decided to add my AF to EOS M adaptor so that I could use the EOS M5 or M50 to capture some macro shots. I have to enlarger lenses a 60mm and a 75mm. As these are planar lenses they are ideal for macro as you get perfectly a flat focal plane. Using the 60mm and the full bellows extension I can get better than life size images. Of course the DOF is extremely small and hence most images will be to be shot using a macro rail and focus stacked. I will also be experimenting using a microscope objective lens to get 4X life size. To go beyond this I would need to consider a 10x objective and a focus lens to be able to get the lens to focus. All good learning experience!



A greater than life-size image of the English 6 pence photographed with the set up above. Flash would be needed to alleviate camera shake etc due to the mounting nature on the focus rail.

JPEG and Noise Reduction



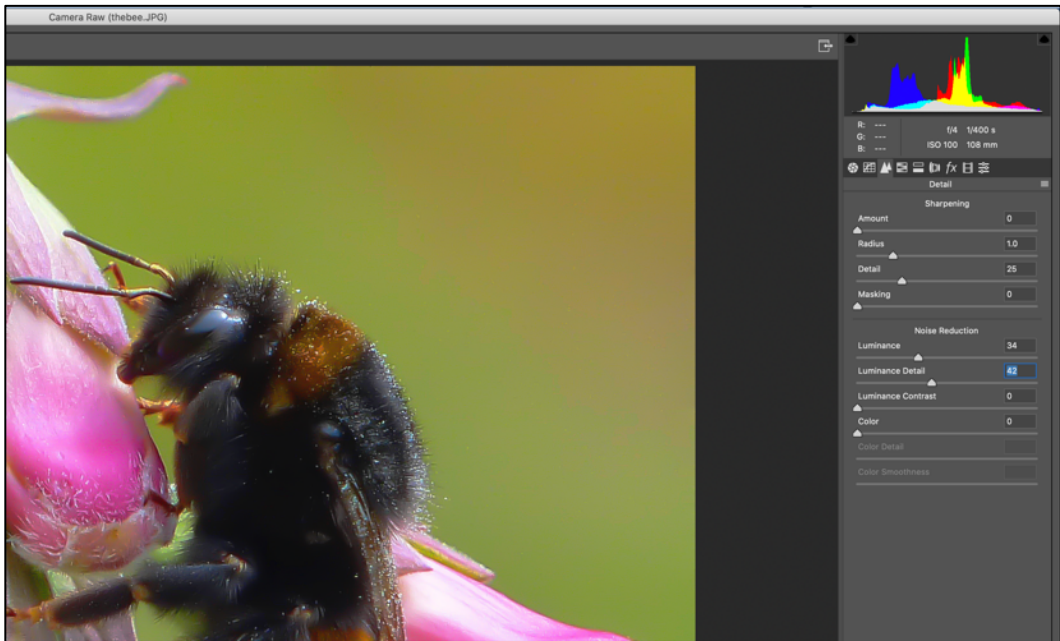
Original JPEG from camera



After clean up in Photoshop Camera RAW

Sometimes out of camera JPEG files shot with high ISO setting have a large amount of image noise. Standard photo editors may not include any noise reduction filters but there is a way to open up the image in the RAW file editor which allows you to then use the noise reduction (both luminance and chrominance) programs. In the Photoshop CC version

you simply go to the filter menu and select Camera Raw Filter. In earlier versions you could “Open as” Camera RAW.



In the camera raw program noise reduction (and sharpening) is found in the Triangular shaped icon.

You can preview the effects of moving the sliders in real time but it is best to increase the image magnification to see the results.

Social Distancing



A walk by the local fisheries (just opened after lockdown) I thought this was appropriate