How to win
the AMA Photo Competition!

Photography Tips from the AMA Journal Editor

Having been in this job (officially) since the AMA AGM in 2016, I have wondered about creating a how-to guide to help readers to take better photos of their expeditions and adventures. With the Christmas rapidly approaching, and more opportunities on leave to get away, this mini-guide aims to add a bit of flare to your photography and hopefully make the AMA photo competition more competitive.

This is by no means an exhaustive how-to guide but should be enough to give you directed reading on the internet, via Google or YouTube. There's a tonne of info out there and clearly, everyone's got their own ideas, however, here are some of mine.

So what makes a good photo?
"You've got a good camera…"

This is often the signature statement of a novice who doesn't understand how to use the kit. Owning a reasonably large Digital SLR camera with lenses and flash modules, I have often been dragged into a conversation with someone looking for me to take their pictures without really knowing what they are letting themselves in for. To put this into perspective, in 2016, the camera most used to take photos uploaded to the website Flickr was not a DSLR, not a point and shoot, but an iPhone. Now I appreciate quality of camera does not always give quality images, however, it does say that you are just as likely to find quality images taken on lower capable devices as you would on top-end full frame cameras. The single greatest contributing factor to better images is composition.

Composition itself is a large subject and is very much subjective. However, as this is a guide, I will pull out specific topics I believe will assist with your expedition shots:

1 WHAT'S THE STORY BEHIND THE IMAGE?

If you are hiking in unforgiving terrain with bad weather and even worse conditions under foot, the story for your image will probably include just that. Having glorious rock at your hands and feet, awe-inspiring backdrops and 1000m of exposure below you would give another. Images tell stories, what story does yours talk about? If you have no story, whoever looks at the image will not make a connection between what you, the photographer saw and what they see.
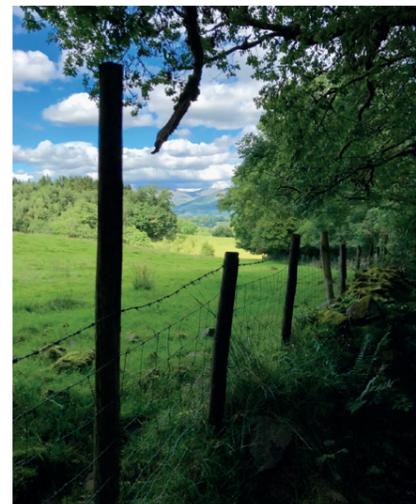
If you read the stories behind famous images, particularly documentary images seen in the news, sporting events, or of wildlife they will all be conveying a story to the reader. The average shot received in recent submissions do not tell stories; they're just digital representations of life. So, what do you need to do?

Identify the story you want your image to convey. Locate the content in your view to tell the story. See subsequent points below

2 POSITIONING

Getting in the right position to the subject is often the hardest part. Sometimes this can be down to timing but more often it'll be down to where you locate the camera. Forget the zoom lens, move your feet and get to a position that allows the image to be captured as it should be.

Move to remove unwanted content from the image. Removing this in Photoshop may be an option but it's a throw away comment which can take significant effort and time. Do yourself a favour, take the shot right first time. Front-page images need 'white space' around the outside and allows for titles, text and suitable positioning on the page. Give your images

a good size gap around the outside of the main content to give it a chance for being used on the front page. I will crop excess white space to make the image fit but not having it in the first place makes things more difficult.

3 RULE OF THIRDS

This is a point which most might already appreciate but makes a massive difference. Essentially, a photo with the main interest point in the centre-centre of the image (and thus adheres to my previous point) is boring.

If your photo has the lines from an imaginary noughts and crosses board overlaid onto it and the image is positioned off-centre, more specifically on one of the crossing points it will naturally draw your eye towards the detail. This is particularly the case for the eyes in photos of people or wildlife.

- Locate one of the eyes on the crosses and you'll draw the viewer into it. Photos with the eyes in the centre look like they're following you around.

- Position horizons on one of the horizontal lines. This will give good perspective to the image

- If your photo is of a pair of climbers, putting them behind one of the vertical lines allows for some context to the image being seen from the backdrop.

This photo also has good white space which made it a good image to being used in the last edition of the journal as a recruiting photo. (Photo: Jack Munnings)
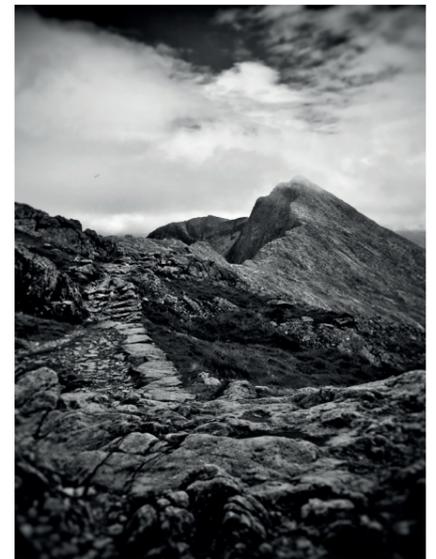
4 LEAD IN LINES

For images where the terrain is the story – perhaps you're conveying the severity of the ground travelled, having depth in it brings the photo to life. How many images have we seen in the photo comp recently that are of snow capped peaks but look flat and un-interesting? A lack of depth is the reason and one way to achieve it is with lead-in lines. These can be natural or manmade features that continue through reality towards the horizon.

For instance, fence lines, knife-edge arêtes (think Crib Goch etc), tracks up hillsides or a line of mountaineers attempting to summit a peak. Although not always joined together, the image is given depth by the presence of multiple features which draw the eye in.

- Find your lead in line feature

- Position this off centre (see the Rule of Thirds)

- Although they do not have to finish at the key element in your photo, e.g. a peak, they work best in this way, so try to position the image so this works in your favour

5 FOREGROUND INTEREST

With big landscape shots, a dominating backdrop can be made even more impressive by finding suitable foreground interest. This also adds depth to your photo and can be as simple as positioning the camera so it shoots a few rocks in a tranquil pool below snow covered peaks or the side of a person's face to add the human element.

camera), small buildings… anything, really!

Ensure that if your image is of the background that the foreground interest does not overpower it! If so, perhaps rethink your shot.

Locate your big background image, then find something which will add some foreground interest. Examples include: Rocks, people (looking at, or away from the

And that's all there is to it! Well, not quite, however, it's a start. The key to all this is practice – so get out there, put yourself in the right place and frame your shots.

It'll give your photography the boost it needs and, you never know, you might even win yourself a prize for your efforts!