CAMERA NOT INCLUDED

The Photography Zine by Ewen Bell



Edition #3
February 2026

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First published in Australia in 2026 by Twocats



EWEN BELL

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ARCTIC LIGHT

Troms / Norway





THE COVER

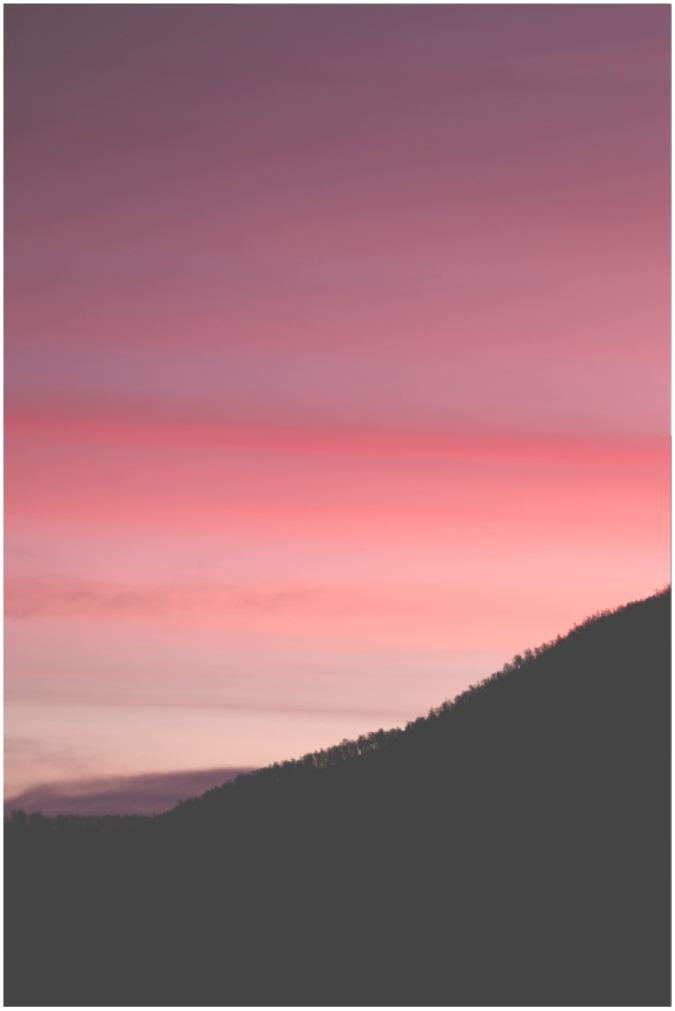
Ridgeline of Revtinden emerges from the clouds. Norway.

There's very little sunshine in this part of the Arctic until the end of January. But that doesn't mean it's completely without photographic inspiration. Arctic colours can be gentle and subdued, and challenge the photographer to be patient.

I started coming to the Arctic in winter because I love the snow. And then I loved the long twilights. And then I fell in love with the auroras. Every year I find something new to love up here.

In this edition of the Zine I'll be delving into some aurora filled nights, but first I wanted to spend a few moments immersed in the light that is without sun. That glint of warmth, that hint of the season unfolding. The anticipation of the sunlight returning is a special thing this far North.









THIS EDITION

One Polar Night

Moon Shines

100-500mm F4.5-7.1 OIS

New Year's Forest

Before The Sun

February 2026

We're immersed in the winter landscapes and skyscapes of teh Arctic for this edition. I love this part of the world.

Something in my genetics is drawn to the long nights and snow of the far north. I first started my journeys to the Arctic in 2010, to visit an old friend from my grad-school days who ended up in Luleå. That one journey started an obsession with life up here.

I've met so many amazing people in The Arctic. There is a sense of community in these places that I have never felt when living in the city, and we are lucky to have a chance to step into these communities for a few months of the year.

The photography is hard work. You have to seize the moment when the light is right, and be patient when the weather turns against us. But there is also plenty of time to spend editing photos on the snow days, and plenty of excitement when the auroras arrive.

If you enjoy this edition, please feel free to share with a friend.

A quick word of thanks to the sponsors who make this publication possible.

As an ambassador for Lumix Australia I enjoy the privilege of using their cameras and lenses for the vast majority of my photography. We have also worked on a few special projects together, often with a view to donating camera equipment to organisations in Asia and the Himalayas.

I also want to thank Peak Design who have been very generous with my projects. I've bought a fair number of their bags over the years, but Peak Design have reached out a few times to let me road test some of their new models. I love their 10L sling especially, as it fits a pair of S9 camera bodies and three lenses, while still leaving room for a water bottle and extras.

Also need to say a word of thankyou to Angelbird, who have been my go-to brand when buying SD cards for so many years now. I have more to say about that later in the zine!

LUMIX








AURORA CIRCLE
Troms & Nordland / Norway

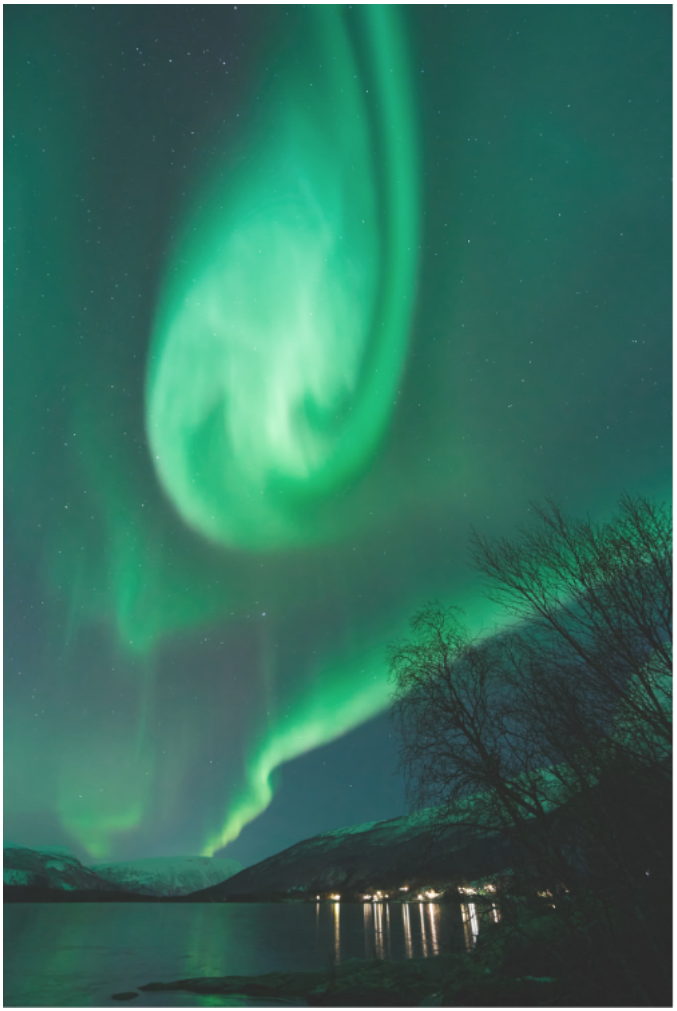
ONE POLAR NIGHT

Arctic Circle, Norway.

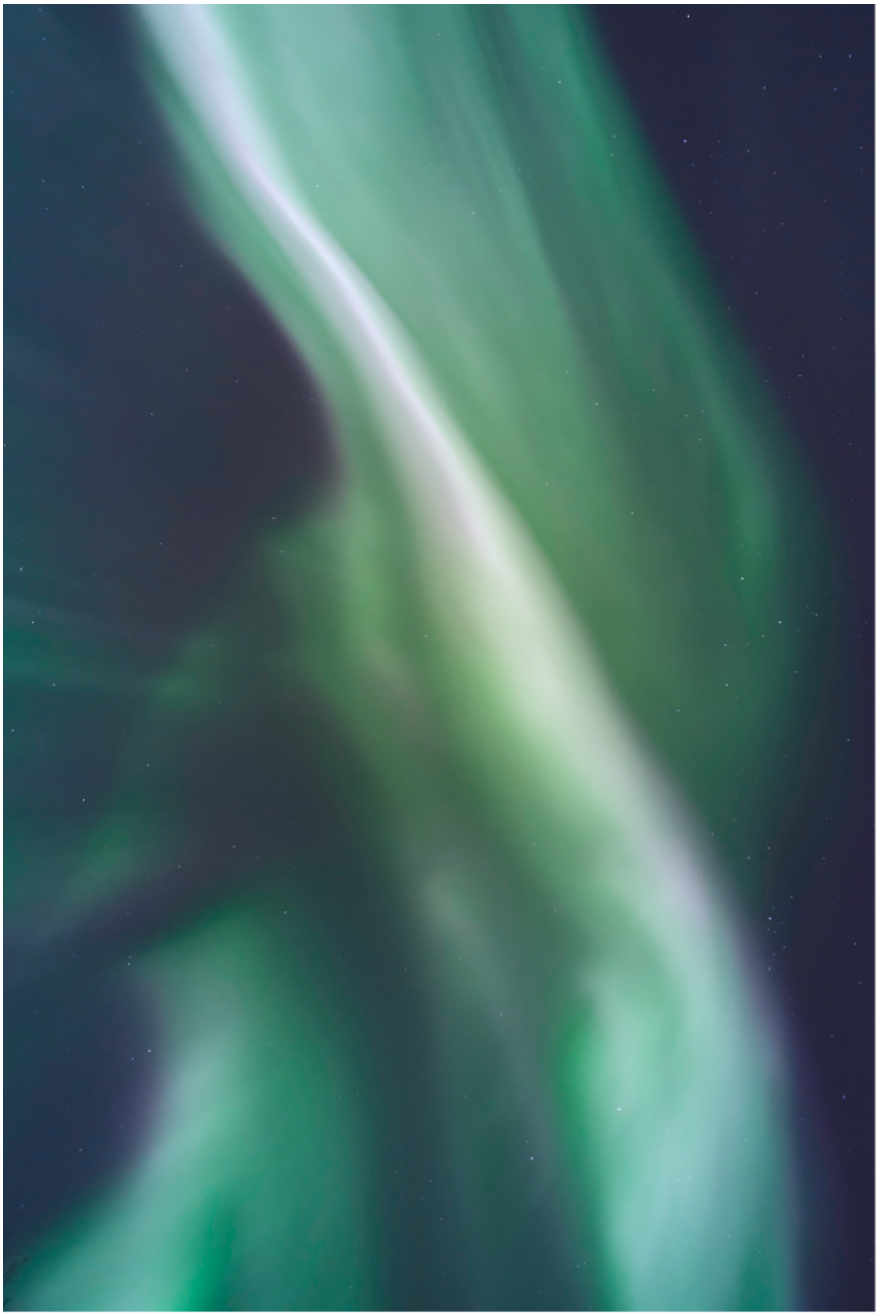
This series was captured in a single hour, on a very dark night when the moon was hiding below the horizon. We were out to dinner with friends, but I had my cameras in the car just in case. In between dinner and dessert we popped out for a quick shoot and a gorgeous dance with the Nordlys.

Not every night of aurora is like this. Some are more memorable than others. Having a disk full of photos does tend to make a night more memorable too.

[Images in this series were captured on the Lumix S9
+ TT Artisan 14mm F2.8 MF
+ TT Artisan 11mm F2.8 MF]







On a gentle night your eyes can struggle to tell the auroras from drifting cloud, let alone detect colours **the way our cameras can**.

But this was not a gentle night. This was an intense eruption of aurora activity, racing across the sky and rippling into new shapes every few seconds. It was garish and loud and absolutely wonderful.

I have my camera setting geared to capture bright moments in the sequence, and use the time-lapse mode to keep the captures rolling. Then I step back and enjoy the show, while the camera does the work.

Alas, sometimes an aurora can get so excited that my exposures end up blown-out anyway. This happened about a dozen times in the space of an hour. Usually I expect to blow-out for maybe a few seconds in the night, but on this evening the nordlys were in quite the mood.



This aurora season I'm experimenting with a couple of cheap lenses made by TT Artisan. One of them is an 11mm Fisheye F2.8, which generates a classic distortion effect towards the edges.

But how to compose my scenes with **such a strong fisheye effect**? I am still learning the artistic merits of this lens. However, the sheer scope of the wide angle is quite compelling for auroras on a night like this.

Even at 14mm you can't tame the full granduer of the Northern Lights. You are only ever capturing a piece of a bigger picture. 11mm goes some way towards broadening my options.











There’s never any certainty about the weather in the Arctic, and clouds are enemy number one. You can’t shoot auroras if the clouds are **stealing the sky**.

The key is to be ready for those breaks in the snow, to be in the right place, to have your camera gear well prepared and always have a plan for where you will shoot when the lights begin to dance.

Some people come up north for auroras and stay for maybe a week, but only see cloud during their visit. You never hear so much about the failures. Nobody comes home and tells you that they didn't see auroras. You will always hear about the people who visited Tromsø for a single night and got lucky.

That's why I don't like to run a workshop that goes for less than two weeks. Sometimes we get lucky of course. One year I got 19 aurora shoots on a 21 night trip. But I prefer good planning to good luck.









MOON SHINES

Arctic Circle, Norway.

Everybody thinks that moonlight will wash out auroras, that the moon makes it harder to see them. But the opposite is true. Moonlight has an additive effect, letting you see more instead of less. The green hues of auroras really burst against a moonlit sky. This is the intensely saturated colour that many photographers strive for. For me I end up wanting to drop the saturation a little, because the camera can be too generous with colour. I prefer to capture realistic colours.

Photography is very beautiful on a moonlit night. There's a lot less contrast in the scene, so the impact of town lights are far less intrusive in compositons. The difference between the dark and light moments are not as intense. I think of moonlight nights as low-contrast, the gentle way to shoot auroras.

[Images in this series were captured on the Lumix S9
+ TT Artisan 14mm F2.8 MF
+ TT Artisan 11mm F2.8 MF]











On this particular night I had no expectations of clear skies, until a nearby friend messaged me that the stars were out. I headed down to the fishing pier to check if the **Nordlys were jumping**.

To the north, clouds coming in. To the south, the moon was painting the night sky blue. It felt like a race between the incoming weather, and satellite data that tantalised the possibility of aurora activity.

Then it arrived. Just a few ribbons at first in the south, turning into a beautiful band that erupted in the East and reached right across the horizon to the West. I had my 11mm with me, so managed to grab a slice of the moment before those clouds moved in proper and shut down the fun.



In recent years I've found myself enjoying **more gentle moments** when chasing auroras. Slower shutters, smooth hues and less drama.

On this evening I had waited patiently for a second burst of aurora. I picked out a scene that I wanted to capture, and figured at some point the nordlys was come dancing through my patch of sky. So I waited. And waited. And waited.

Sometimes when you miss the first burst of aurora, what follows can be a little tepid. And this was such a night. I was about to pack up and go home for a hot dinner, when I little aurora activity popped into view. It was near my frame, but not quite there. In the following minutes it ebbed and waned, while moving ever closer to my scene.

The last gasps of this aurora danced into my view, I took a few frames, and then it faded into nothing once more.





100-500mm F4.5-7.1 OIS



FULL FRAME TELE

LUMIX 100-500mm F4.5-7.1 OIS L-Mount

This lens brings something very special to owners of L-mount full-frame bodies. It's a very compact design for what it delivers, and very sharp. The stabilsation is bang on, delivering some great opportunities to shoot handheld.

For the last month I've been using it in the Arctic. This level of telephoto is not essential up here, unless you want to chase eagles on the fjord, but I really like to zoom in on snowy mountain tops every so often. The cover photos for this edition were taken using this 100-500mm.

So I always have this telephoto in the bag when taking a drive. At the time of writing this we're still a week or so away from seeing the sun return, so everything I'm shooting is with very very gentle light of the Arctic winter.











When I reviewed this lens last year for a YouTube video I was taking photos of wrens in the bush near Melbourne. Now I'm in the frozen Arctic winter and I'm not seeing this lens as just for wildlife. I do love having a few "tight" compositions as part of a photo essay, and a nice telephoto is very good for that.

I often focus on the mountains around us, and the snowy peaks. Epsecially when the light is doing something interesting. But on this particular morning the moon was glowing bright just above the horizon. That seemed just a little bit special.





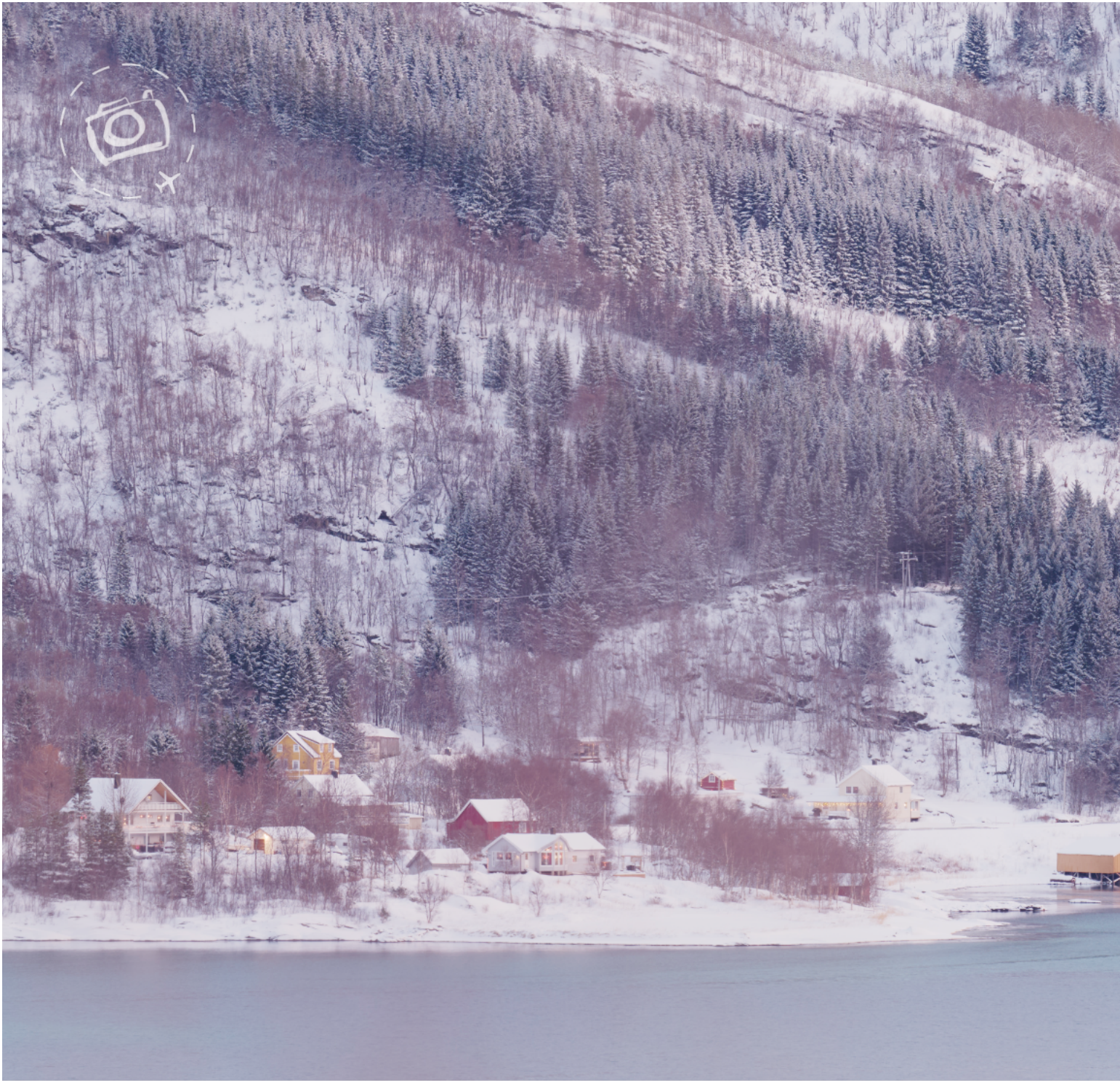
I posted a YouTube video about this lens late last year, and I got a lot of questions at the time about whether this is better than the Sigma 60-600mm F4.5-6.3 OS.

I love that Sigma super-telephoto and have spent a lot of time in the field with it, but it is very heavy to lug about. This new lens by Lumix is a whole other ball game compared to the Sigma. Not quite the same zoom range, but weighs so much less and is a lot more practical to pack away for travels.



I had my Sigma 60-600mm with me in the Arctic last year as well. The stabislation on the Sigma at 600mm wasn't as good as this Lumix at 500mm. When you attach the Sigma lens the S1RII disables it's internal stabe and lets the lens take over. With the Lumix 100-500mm the internal and lens stabe work in harmony.

I've been mostly using this Lumix 100-500mm handheld instead of on the tripod. The stabe is doing the hard work for me. I have this lens on loan from Lumix at the moment, so it will be a shame when it's time to give it back.





EWEN'S WORKSHOPS

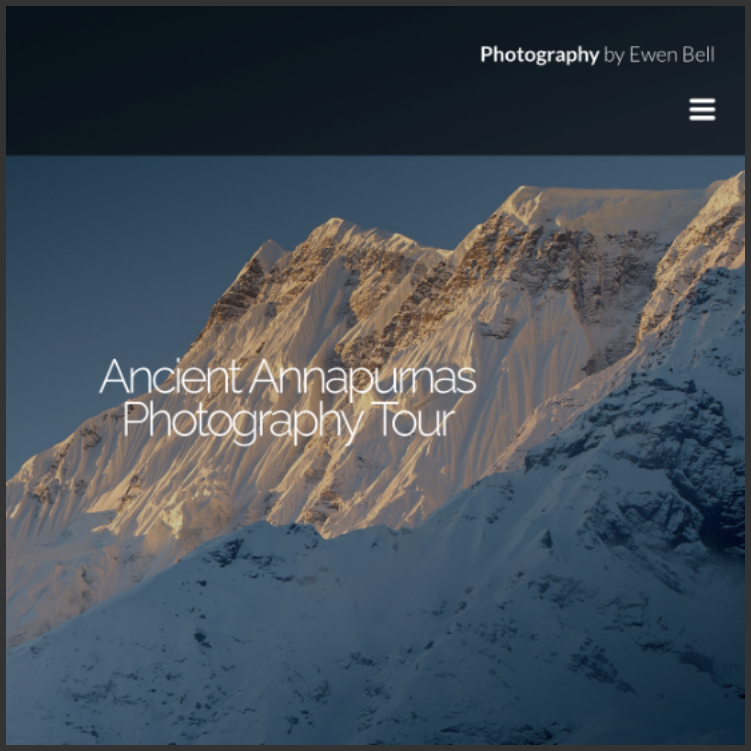
Intimate photographic experiences with Ewen Bell

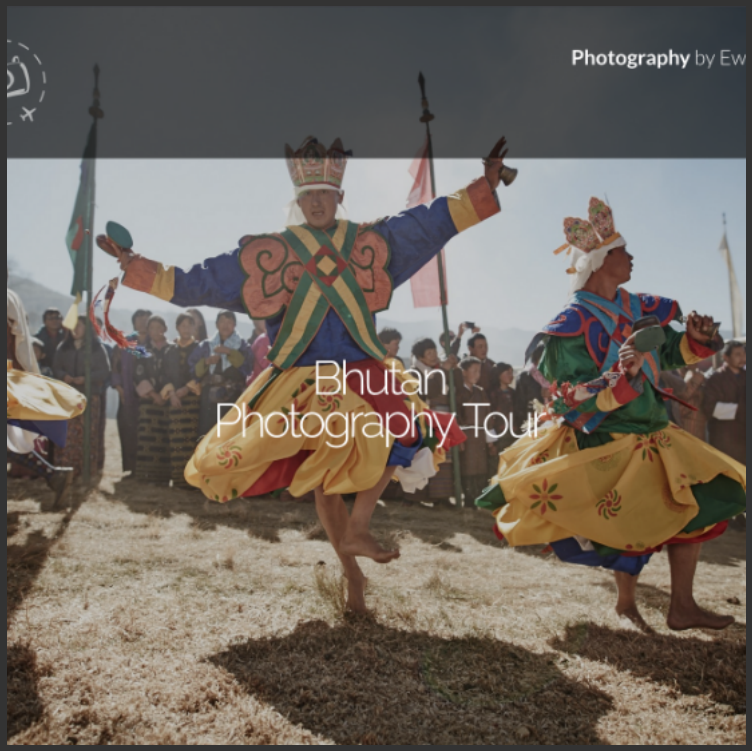
Every year I run a handful of workshops and photo tours in various parts of the world. I have been doing this for twenty years now, and every year I try to find ways to make each experience more rewarding. It's never the same workshop twice.

I run my tours in places I know very very well. I don't outsource my expertise. I care about these places and believe they offer something special to my companions. We learn about the cultures and landscapes, as much as we do photography.

Visit the website for more details.

ewenbell.com/tours


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Photography Tour


Photography by Ew
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Make Your Captures Delicious


Photograp
Aurora Residency
Photographic Workshop in Arctic Norway

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Thankyou Angelbird

Angelbird make a bunch of high performance memory card, and now also some excellent USB/Thunderbolt cables. My journey with this brand began in 2020 when we started making recipe videos at home. Shellie did the recipe development and styling, and I did the video and editing. We quickly realised that “sustained data rate” was way more important than any maximum speed a card night claim to offer. The max speeds you see on the labels tend to drop off after a minute of shunting data onto the laptop.

Anyway, back then I scored a killer deal on some 256gb micro SD cards by Angelbird, and I've been buying their stuff ever since. My minimum spec for SD cards now is V60, which means 60MBytes/sec (480mbps). This gives me enough grunt for shooting 6K 10bit video, or for high speed continuous burst when shooting birds or festivals. And it's fast to download at the end of the day. That matters when you're on the road.

Angelbird also supported us on the Tashi documentary project, with their affordable yet impressive SE range of CFExpress cards. I'm still using these in my Lumix S1RII, and still using my Angelbird SD cards in my other cameras. So I'm super happy to have them as a sponsor of this publication.


AV PRO SE
CFexpress B
512GB
3700MB/s


GROVFJORD
Troms / Norway



NEW YEAR'S FOREST

Arctic Circle, Norway.

We spent New Year's Eve with friends, eating too much food and then watching everyone in the street set off their fireworks. By the time we got home there was a break in the clouds, so I decided to head into the forest in search of Nordlys. I have a few favourite places within a short drive of home, but picked the same trail I had visited the night before... knowing that my footprints have already carved a path through the deep snow.

What happened after that was just very very special. I am so happy to share some of these moments. It's nights like this that make me wish everyone could come and see the Nordlys for themselves. To stand in a frozen forest under the moonlight and watch auroras emerge in the sky.

[Images in this series were captured on the Lumix S9
+ TT Artisan 14mm F2.8 MF
+ TT Artisan 11mm F2.8 MF]





I call these "ice cream trees". We'd had a few days of **heavy snow fall** to cover the forest and the trees. Sometimes the fresh snow doesn't stay on the trees for long though, if we get some windy weather.

Some of my favourite places to photograph in winter are sheltered from the wind, so the ice cream trees get heavier and heavier. Our little patch of Norway is on the coast, so you don't see quite so much snow... and even less ice cream.



I'm not big on selfies. I'm better **behind the camera** than in front of it.

But the moonlight was throwing a little bit of magic across the scene, and all I had to do was hold still for 5 seconds. Which turns out to be waaaay too long for me to hold still. After ten minutes of blurry smiles I realised I should get out of the way and start capturing a few scenes of the Nordlys and forest instead.







My journey to find scenes that work with the 11mm Fisheye lens had a little win this evening. Having a strong subject in the centre of the lens helps the **composition find balance**, and draws the eye away from the bendy bits in the corners.

There's a little flaring happening too, which I don't hate. In some ways the wonkiness of a fisheye adds to the drama of the moment, when auroras ripple in the sky.

I love that 11mm is sooooo wide that it still grabs a chunk of sky and auroras, even though half the frame is filled with forest.










“The entire point of art is to express yourself, rather than be limited by the expression of others.”



BEFORE THE SUN

Arctic Circle, Norway.

In this part of Norway the sun returns above the horizon on January 27, depending on which side of the mountain you live. Even if you're lucky, you only get a glimpse of the sun.

For most of January I am shooting "before dawn". On a clear day we get a warm glow to the south, where the sun is hiding behind the horizon. The Arctic give us hints of what we're missing out on. The morning light goes from black to blue. If we're lucky there might be a burst of pink as well, mixed with a dash of orange.

I have only ever seen this shade of pink in the Arctic.

[Images in this series were captured on the
Lumix S1RII + Sigma 28-105mm F2.8
+ Lumix 100-500mm F4.5-7.1
& Lumix S9 + TT Artisan 40mm F2 AF]









If you've never heard of a photographer from Scotland by the name of **Bruce Percy**, then I highly recommend to look him up. He is a master of photography without the sun. I suspect he wouldn't even step outside with a camera if the sun was even threatening to cast a shadow upon the landscape.

Looking back on some of my captures this winter, I can see a little of Bruce in these photos. I was not aware of this until compiling my zine. Perhaps this is an example of convergent evolution, of how the environment itself directs our growth towards particular solutions. Or perhaps something of Bruce has nestled into my brain without me knowing.



I have to change the way I **think about composition** when there is no sun to work with. My default is to shoot into the sun and let the chaos of light guide me to a shot. That doesn't work in the gentle glow of the "Polar night".

I am reminded that so much of photography is dedicated to revealing the details, but sometimes it's even more rewarding to hold back on them a little. To let the shadows take over a little. I think of this as giving the audience room to imagine for themselves what may or may not be present. Let them participate in creating the photo, but in their own mind.





I am grateful to the **moon coming to visit** us in the polar night. It seems so cheeky of the moon to pop over the horizo,n when the sun refuses to. It glows orange, relfecting solar rays and bringing a cheerful note to our corner of The Arctic.

I love the moon at night, but it feels even more impressive during the day. Hanging low over the horizon, and casting a light far brighter than anything else above or below it.







WHO MADE THIS?

Meet The Author

My name is Ewen Bell and I'm a photographer based in Melbourne, Australia. I've been very lucky in life to had the opportunity to make a career from photography.

For over two decades I've been travelling and shooting, which is why I have this photo of me in Bhutan when I was MUCH younger and better looking than I am now :) You can tell it's an old photo because I'm holding a DSLR camera.

Photography has changed my world, so I want to help others find their voice with the camera as well. I love sharing my photos, but also love sharing my knowledge about taking photos. That's why I'm making a zine, in addition to my blog and my YouTube channel.

ewenbell.com



#EWENTUBE

I share a bunch of photos and ideas on my YouTube channel. You can also watch them on the Fediverse via PeerTube for those who prefer ad-free viewing

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