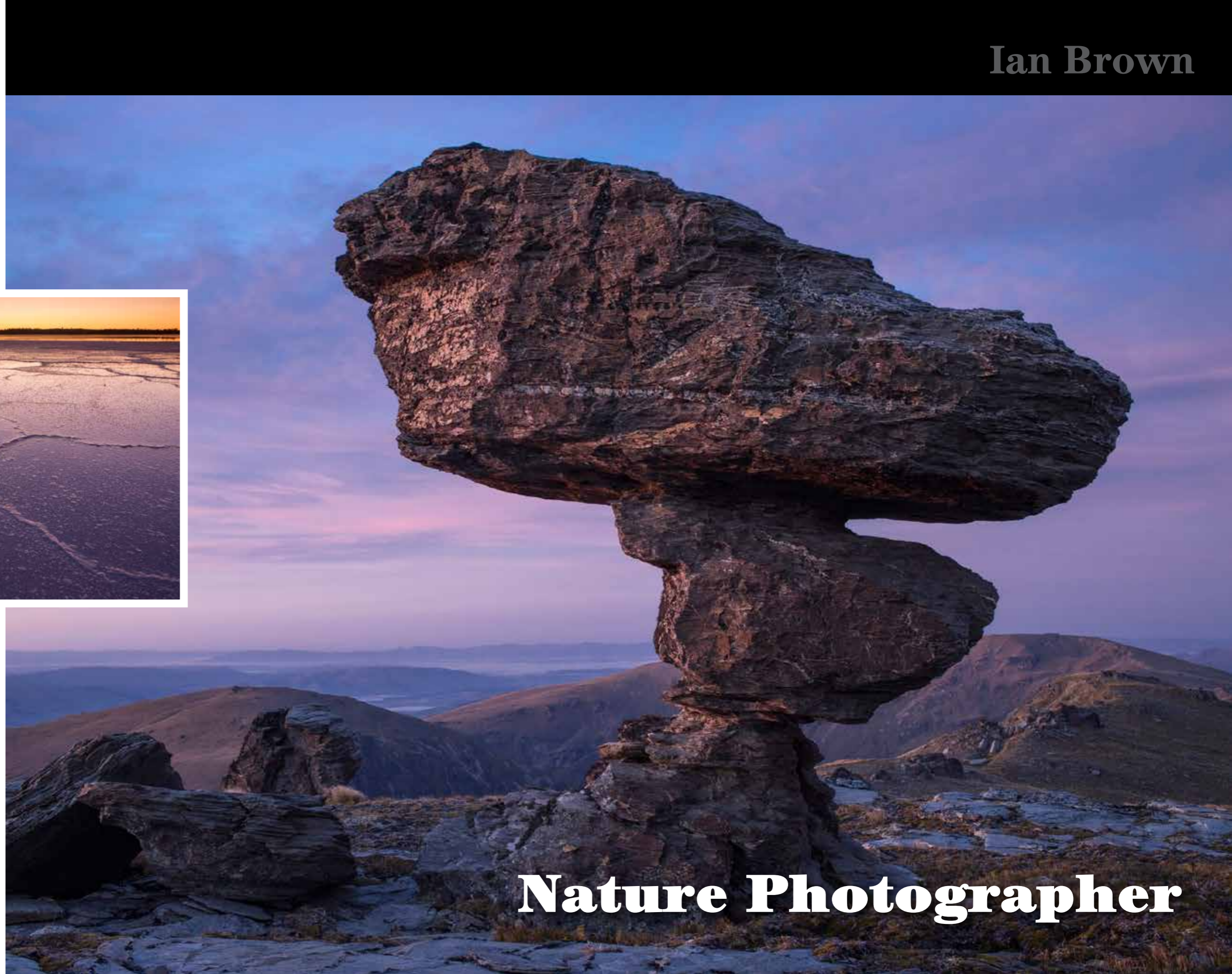


Explaining his passion, this nature photographer says, “Often you discover something better than you could ever have imagined, and that’s the most special of all”.



I jammed both large format film and digital equipment into my pack, with as little camping gear and food as I could get away with, and trekked to a familiar mountain-top with wide vistas of wilderness and interesting foregrounds. Through the late afternoon and evening I wandered around the cliff-tops, scoping possible compositions and even getting a few pleasing images. I went to bed hoping for clear dawn light.

Before sunrise I woke to a gloomy, engulfing fog. I usually relish fog, but this wasn't the best place for it to be. Disappointed, I set up my tripod anyway, looking for alternative ideas. As the light grew, I noticed variations in the gloom – and suddenly the clouds parted. The rising sun poked briefly through a gap in the clouds. There was no time to use my large format camera, but I captured “Sunrise, Kowmung country” on the quicker digital. It is one of my favourites.



Nature Photographer



I have roamed widely across Australia and sometimes overseas, usually for the wilderness experience rather than just for photography, but even when climbing mountains in New Zealand I've usually carried a good (if small) camera. These days my trips can have twin objectives, and locally I often bushwalk mainly to photograph. My favourite method is to get to a good site and spend time wandering around absorbing the place, looking for potential images, then photograph at my leisure. That's one reason I enjoy fog and other dull weather, because you don't have to rush. I think I do my best work that way. I often just sit, to look and listen, and have recently begun recording natural sounds. Sometimes you have to go for it, such as when the weather or light is changing fast, but I don't enjoy that as much, even though those conditions can produce dramatic and unique images.

Ian Brown

There's nothing better than being in the wilds when something wondrous happens. Every fibre zings, focus is intense, and for a few moments nothing else matters. If it is possible to capture the moment in a powerful image, then the exhilaration can be extended. I've learnt that you can travel with all sorts of expectations, but you can never predict what might happen or what you might see. Often you discover something better than you could ever have imagined, and that's the most special of all.

Now I travel hopefully, but try to remain open to everything. I practice looking to see, and responding to the unexpected. Too often I've walked past an opportunity while focused on something else. I know now that you can rarely go back, because it won't be the same. Nature changes all the time. If instinct whispers that the combination of subject, form and light are right, right now, then I try to listen and act. The more time you spend at it, the better your instinct will become.

My photography arises from my relationship with nature. I spent a lot of time 'mucking about' in the local bush as a kid – sometimes with a yobbo lack of sensitivity. But my first 'serious' bushwalk changed my life. It was in the Blue Mountains in NSW, tough and exhausting: four days in big, intimidating terrain. Yet I was never frightened, and back at school I couldn't get those blue plunging ridges out of my head. I found the bush so inspiring, I just wanted to record the beauty and wonders to show people. I got a small camera. Decades later my motivation has grown more complex and yet that sense of wonder and the desire to discover and reveal remain strong.

Those early experiences shaped my outlook and my life. I studied environmental science and have worked in national park management and environmental consulting. I continue to undertake wilderness journeys and to lend my time to conservation causes, mainly for nature protection. There's nothing better than seeing my photographs promoting the value and importance of the wild.

I love new country, but also return to the same places, often on well-tramped tracks. Most artists rework themes and themselves, forever striving for that elusive perfection – or at least a quixotic personal satisfaction. The Blue Mountains where I live and work is an incredibly rich landscape that continues to surprise and inspire me. Some of my best images have come from close to home. It was the great photographer Edward Weston who said (with a twinkle in his eye, I think): “Anything more than 500 yards from the car just isn’t photogenic”!

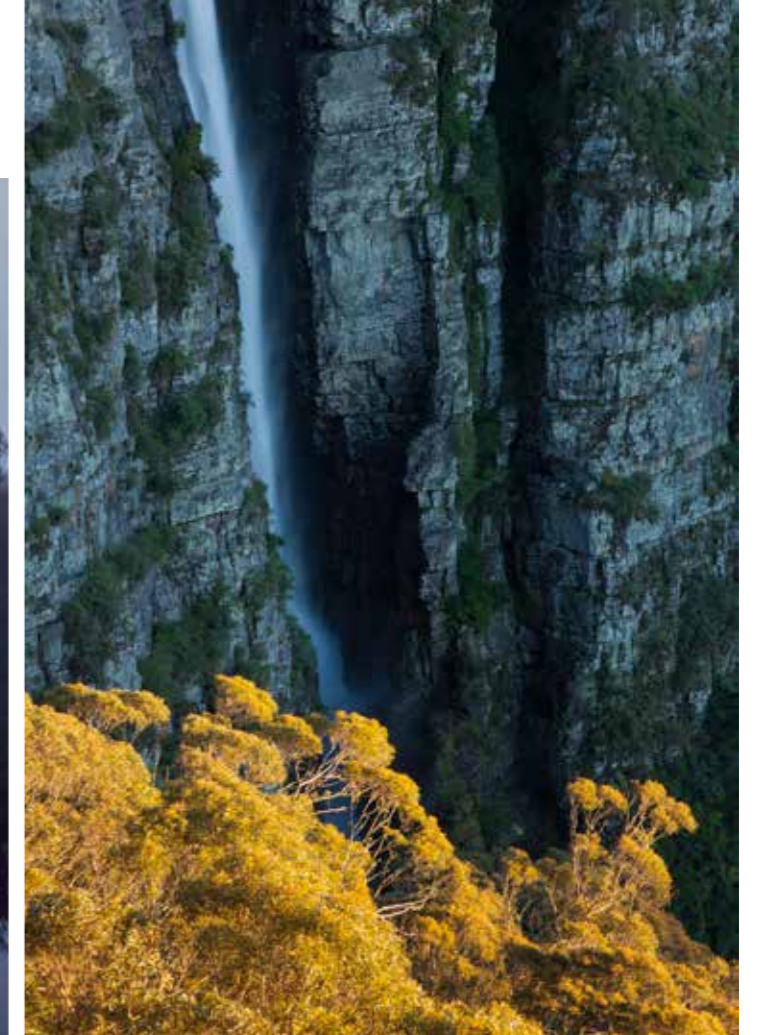
I have never worked full time in photography, and maybe that’s a good thing. As much as I like to make some income from it, I do not see myself as a commercial photographer (and let’s face it, no nature photographer should ‘give up their day job’!). I like following my own artistic impulses, making photographs out of love.

My work has appeared in numerous calendars, diaries, magazines and websites, and I enjoy exhibiting in the Blue Mountains and selling prints to other nature lovers. The stocks of my 2003 book “Wild Blue” are nearly gone, and I’m thinking

of a new project. For a number of years now I have published some of my best work in the limited edition “Wild Blue Mountains Calendar”, an unprofitable but satisfying project, and a good focus for my endeavours.

From my early days in 35mm, I moved into medium format film for the resolution and then 4 x 5 inch large format. Some of my favourite images came out of my old medium format press camera, and I still very much enjoy the contemplation and process of using the large format view camera, with its precise control of the focal plane and composition. When a film image succeeds it is intensely satisfying, but digital is often more practical and has other advantages like exposure certainty, post-capture adjustment, stitching, and focus stacking. Depending on whom you believe, full-frame digital cameras are now approaching the resolution of medium or large format film, at a price.

Digital offers endless potential for post-capture manipulation. But in keeping with my philosophy of respecting nature, I try to “keep it real”. I dislike the current fashion for over-saturation



and exaggerated reality, feeling it dishonours nature and creates false expectations. It can also sacrifice content and subtlety for immediate impact that quickly fades – just another extension of the consumerist mindset. I prefer to seek out unusual subjects and compelling light.

I have a collection of fine photographic books from many photographers who have inspired me, all for different reasons. And it is also nice to know that even revered photographers don’t always produce stunning work. Truly great images are rare and precious. I also enjoy and gain inspiration from other visual arts.

I have reached the finals of the ANZANG Nature Photography competition three times. It can be nice to get confirmation that someone else thinks you’re producing worthwhile work, but only a fool would take too much from “winning” or “losing” in competitions which always come down to judges’ whims and a bit of luck. I figure it is better to aim to consistently produce solid work that collectively tries to meet your artistic aspirations. Then maybe, very rarely, if ever, you might come up with something wonderful.

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