

## COOLPIX - THE NEXT GENERATION

Nikon have been on quite a high since launching the Coolpix 900. This is the camera that put them on the digital map. Just as the film scanners have rather led the way so it could be said of the Coolpix 900. It became something of a benchmark. Better yet it was the camera that others wished they had made. Many tried to outbox the technology of the Coolpix and failed.

Nikon showed that the resolution figure was just part of the story. What happens to the data after it hits the chip and gets converted into digits is paramount. Squash it in an unsympathetic way and the picture suffers. (See earlier article Painting by Numbers if you are a bit lost here) By using a reasonably friendly sort of compression the Nikon Coolpix can show more of its innate quality. From the purist's point of view anything that throws away data cannot be very friendly (and Nikon have consider this, more later) but Nikon have struck a great compromise.

The radical design of the Coolpix



900 was quickly accepted and any worries about how comfortable it would be in use melted away. The LCD screen on the back meant I have never used the viewfinder, but I hear it is good. The flash system worked extremely well and the addition of an external flash option (via a socket) on the Coolpix 900S was welcome. The so-called consumer end of the digital image market is an interesting place. Rather like any other computer-based product, waiting a while brings along something faster, more powerful and often for less money.

So from the excellent base of the Coolpix 900/S Nikon have

developed the new Coolpix 950. Away from the crowds at Focus I had the chance to see this new camera. Chris Hoare from Nikon UK had the task of trying to brief me on the spec of the new machine. The specification sheet of the Nikon Coolpix 950 is anything but brief, so this was quite a task. But he succeeded in getting my interest.

The 950 is a visually stunning machine. The black finish, the sleek magnesium

*Continued on page 2...*

*Featured in this edition of the Grays of Westminster Gazette...*

- Tony Munday - Coolpix - The Next Generation
- Nick Wynne - In Praise of You
- Tooled Up
- Heather Angel Workshop 1999
- John Archer-Thompson - The Joy of Having Two Bodies
- Gray Levett - Nikon Legend - Part LVI

bodywork, wow! I had been lucky to spy a shot of the camera some time prior but still found the real thing moving. But the Coolpix 950 is not just a prettied-up 900. The new camera is based around a new image capture chip. It has something in excess of two million pixels and the image area of 1200 by 1600 uses a large number (1.92 million) of them.

Speaking of image area and the issue of file compression gives me a chance to mention the option of storing an uncompressed image, a TIFF (Tagged Image File Format). This 5MB (megabyte) plus file is just about the raw data as far as I understand. It allows the very highest quality to be attained. The reason for not using this all day is that even an otherwise capacious 48MB data storage card will soon cry stop.

Still on the subject of file size there is the matter of getting the file from the camera to the computer. The tradition of connecting the camera directly to the computer is one Nikon are recommending we consign to the history books. They are pointing us towards an excellent replacement, the card reader. This will accept the data card (Compact Flash Card) and will send the data along a wire to the computer. The current card readers avoid the usual connection socket, known as the serial port, and instead use either the parallel (printer) socket or the newer USB (Universal Serial Bus).

The USB socket option is of interest to those running recent machines. Mac, notably the I-Mac will use the USB flavour and so will a recent PC. The proviso is that a PC will need to be running Windows 98 to support use of the USB port. Those using Windows 95

(late versions) may well be able to use it and I will give this a try and report. Windows NT users will have to wait for newer versions with USB support.

What Nikon have done is made the Coolpix even more of a photographer's camera. It has sprouted a command wheel, aperture and shutter priority, manual focus and all sorts of very camera-like functions. This is a further evolution of the Coolpix 900/900S line. I expect to see remote releases and such if this carries on. Nikon are rightly acknowledging the fact that cameras above the £500 mark often fall into the hands of the more serious user. The extra control is not at the expense of point and shoot operation.

There is hardly the room to get mention all of the features of the Coolpix 950. Clever ones stand out; it can shoot a sequence and then pick out the sharpest shot, for example. I feel that I would have to be using the camera for a while to give a better-informed story. It still has the Nikon 3x optical zoom (about 35-105 equivalent) with the aspheric lens element. It now has what Nikon are happy to refer to as Matrix metering (256 zones). The optional fish-eye and wide-angle lens attachments are useable, as is a new 2x teleconverter.

My initial inspection confirmed the computer chips in the camera had been beefed up. The camera was ready to use in less time than the earlier Coolpix and could change from record to play mode with less time watching the on-screen egg timer. Large buffer memory is the technical explanation. Greater capacity for shoving huge files around is the result.

Nikon have taken the chance to

let out data well before release of the camera so Nikon watchers can know what is coming up. The camera itself will appear early May, unless favourable winds speed its arrival. We have a number on order and have some buyers registering their interest already. We will be switching to one for our website and other publishing use and I hope to give a hand-on story in the next Gazette.

The camera will ship in basic form for just under £800.00 including VAT. We will be again recommending the more useful premium bundle for about another £60.00, to be confirmed.

*by Tony Munday*

“May I take this opportunity of thanking your company for the excellent service that you provide.

I am aware that my son has written to you following his purchase of an F2AS he bought from you recently.

The quality of your goods and the service you provide is unsurpassed and I hope one day to visit your shop in person with my family.

Nikon should be proud to have such companies as yours to represent it and time permitting if you would supply me with their current address I will write and tell them so.”

I. R. Alton. Shropshire

# IN PRAISE OF YOU

It is a lucky person indeed who works for a living dealing with something in which they have a high interest. A test driver for Jaguar or Lotus or Ferrari might be an example. A test pilot of super high tech aircraft would be another or an astronaut guiding a space shuttle. My high interest in Nikon, their creative design and their splendid engineering execution of these designs, make my job jolly interesting. The other factor that interests me just as much (and that means a great deal) is people and especially customers meaning you! Just in case you ever wondered, we think you are great! Your enthusiasm for Nikon, your politeness, your patience, your good nature, your curiosity are just some of the qualities that make it fascinating dealing with you. Since you don't meet as many customers as we do, although you do bump into one or two when you come into the shop, I thought it might be interesting to record for you some of the remarks made by your fellows. Julian for example passed on to me last month from first hand experience that 50mm is the perfect focal length to record your salmon catch. Perhaps you should carry a 35mm though just in case you some day actually land the one that got away!

The following act typical of our customers: upon receiving his *Gazette* plastic wrapped twice due to a machine error, a customer phoned us with the address label details from the inner wrapping, "So that the person wouldn't be disappointed at not receiving that issue of the

*Gazette*". Bravo, I say! I remember a witty customer who had seen the giant lens hood for his 600mm f/4 lens roll over a cliff on a wildlife shoot. Upon discovering the not inconsiderable price of a replacement (£482) he enquired whether he would break a record by asking for 0% finance on a lens hood....



Another customer was amused when calling in two days in a row to the shop to find that whereas the Nippon Kogaku Room (our early Nikon display area) was being warmed by an electric heater on the first day, the next day saw the air conditioner called into service! I suppose we English will forever find our climate and its surprises amusing. A regular customer named Nick phoned me some months ago from the Sahara Desert of all places to acknowledge receipt of something we'd sent. Now there's a man who considers courtesy is never

too much trouble! G.G. of Oxon relayed to me the story of being caught in a cyclone in India. The rain fell so fast that the temple steps on which he stood disappeared under a torrent of water. He was unable to cover his trusty Nikon F2AS and Motor Drive which were as soaked as he. After drying out in the sun after the storm both units worked perfectly! Another customer whose name I was remiss in recording chuckled throughout telling me that his wife and her camera outfit suffered a bit of a fall. She was fine he continued, as her fall was mercifully broken by a Sigma lens! One customer looked at me mischievously when I jokingly asked him not to run off without paying for a lens he was trying out. "Couldn't contemplate that", he retorted. "You'd take me off the *Gazette* mailing list!" Another time a customer was sharing a joke about the Yorkshire saying "There's nowt so queer as folk". To him the funniest bit was my efforts at explaining what it meant to a Russian visitor who had overheard us. A tough one! Not that the humour is all originated by our customers. A discussion about Nikon's legendary all embracing compatibility dissolved into uproar when our Mr. Tony Munday remarked on this topic that it was bearing that very factor in mind that decided him upon the course of buying his ex-wife a Canon! So to you our customers, a big thank you - for enriching the tapestry of our lives!

by Nick Wynne

# TOOLED UP

Judging by the response to our announcement that we now stock the Leatherman multi-tools you think it is a good idea too. It seems that we are having to reorder more every few days. In view of this I thought you would like to know about a rather unique accessory from their range which we have just taken into stock. It is called the Tool Adapter.

The Leatherman Tool Adapter enables one to widen the versatility of four models. It is simple to fit and use. It slides easily over the jaws of the Super Tool, PST (Pocket Survival Tool), PST II or Sideclip and attaches firmly to provide a standard ¼ inch hex drive. The Tool Adapter comes in a compact carrying case which holds the

Adapter plus six supplied screw bits: No. 1 and No. 3 Phillips, No. 1 and No. 2 Robertson (square), No. 15 Torx and Nos. 8-10 slotted. Leatherman's engineers have

weighs 1.6 ounces and carries a 25-year guarantee. It costs £25.00 including case.



designed the Tool Adapter to be used in straight, 45-degree and 90-degree positions. The Leatherman Tool Adapter is made from high-grade tool steel,

## HEATHER ANGEL WORKSHOP JULY 1999

When we chose Saint Hill Manor estate as the site for our Heather Angel Workshops last year we really had no idea just what an ideal and popular choice of venue it would turn out to be. At the close of each of the two days I was approached by several people telling me what a perfect place Saint Hill Manor was and insisting that we must come back again the following year.

These statements were later echoed in letters, faxes

and phone calls telling us what a marvellous time they had had, many booking a place for the next one! I am therefore delighted to inform you that we are again hosting the Heather Angel Workshops at beautiful Saint Hill Manor, East Grinstead, West Sussex on the weekend of 17th and 18th July 1999. You have a choice of which day to attend.

For those of you who were unable to join us last year and for those

of you who are thinking of joining us this year I thought it appropriate that I describe the area for you.

Saint Hill Manor is one of the finest sandstone buildings in existence and was built in 1792 by Gibbs Crawford, whose grandson was instrumental in having the first railway to East Grinstead built in 1845. A subsequent owner, Dr. Edgar March Crookshank, greatly

expanded Saint Hill by adding wings to the Manor. Other owners of this fine building included the Maharajah of Jaipur as well as Mrs Neville Lasky



who generously accommodated Royal Airforce officers who were patients of Sir Archibald McIndoe, pioneer of plastic surgery at East Grinstead's famous Queen Victoria Hospital.

The final owner, best selling author and distinguished photographer L. Ron Hubbard acquired the Manor and its magnificent 55 acres of landscaped gardens and grounds in 1959. Mr. Hubbard personally oversaw much of the work done to restore the Manor to its original beauty.

Last year Heather gave her fascinating illustrated lecture in the Monkey Room which is named after the delightful 100 foot mural of monkeys painted in 1945 by Sir Winston Churchill's nephew, John Spencer Churchill. This will also be the setting for her talk this year. Other features of the remarkable interior are the elegant Winter Garden, the Georgian style windows and many marble fireplaces and floors. These have all been expertly preserved and restored. Original plasterwork ceilings and wood panelling are part of Saint Hill Manor's architectural history.

Saint Hill Manor nestles amidst the rolling green hills of Sussex. Standing on the Manor terrace one can gaze down towards the lake, which lies bounded by a small wood. You will be free to

roam here and elsewhere in the magnificent grounds where there are plenty of opportunities to take photographs.

Heather starts off our day with an illustrated lecture on a broad range

of subjects - landscapes, plants, animals and close-ups - giving many tips and explaining why particular lenses were chosen for specific shots. Following this you will have a chance to handle a wide range of Nikon equipment and to discuss them with Mark Fury from Nikon UK and the staff of Grays of Westminster. Also available for inspection will be Benbo and Gitzo tripods, Domke bags and Leatherman multi-tools.

After lunch we have outside photography where Heather will demonstrate lighting techniques and be on hand to answer queries.

You will also have a chance to win a prize for the best photograph taken during the weekend's activities. And if that is not enough, Tony Munday of Grays of Westminster will run a tutorial on the subject of flash photography.

The workshop starts at 9.00am and runs until 5.00pm. Tickets including refreshment cost £125.00 each. Attendance is limited to 35 people each day. Please contact us to book your place by telephone 0171-828 4925 fax 0171-976 5783 or by e-mail: [graylevett@graysofwestminster.co.uk](mailto:graylevett@graysofwestminster.co.uk)

"Thank you very much for sending the lens hood for the 80-200/2.8D - a perfect match.

I was amazed to receive it the following morning at 07.45!! Considering that I didn't ring you until after 15.00 (the day before) - an awesome level of service, only Grays etc., etc., you must get sick of the praise!"

J. Graver, North Devon



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# THE JOY OF HAVING TWO BODIES

by John Archer-Thompson

I'm not terribly good at mornings.

My traditional reaction to the alarm clock might be described as something negative and I could reasonably be classified along with the walking dead until I've had at least one cup of morning tea. Given this rather sorry state of affairs, it might be stretching the reader's creditability to say that for eight mornings in July 1998, when I woke up, my first reaction was to laugh and my second was to leap out of bed. If I add that I was working at the time you might be forced to deduce that the author must be one stop short of a correct exposure.

The reason for this uncharacteristically jolly behaviour was that I had been asked to go to the Caribbean to take photographs above and below the water, of coral reefs and anything likely to affect their well being. Rather reluctantly, as you can imagine, I packed my gear and headed away from the UK's pathetic excuse for a summer and ended up in Barbados under the friendly auspices of the Caribbean Conservation Association.

The first two days were spent getting shots of mangrove swamps, marinas, shops selling bits of dead coral and shells, fishing boats, fish markets, sewage outfalls and a whole host of other things that might affect the reefs directly and indirectly. It was during this time that I was reminded of a law of photography that applies every time you wish to take

more than one picture in a row (i.e. all the time), namely, "The next picture to be taken will require a different lens than the one you currently have on the camera." Admittedly on land this is not an insurmountable hurdle but it does become a bit of a pain after a while.

Underwater, changing lenses is the sort of activity reserved for



the very rich and/or cerebrally challenged. Normal people don't do it because it has a tendency to destroy cameras rather quickly leading to a general wailing and gnashing of teeth. Rather obviously this does put some serious constraints on what you can photograph, you have to decide on "close-up" or "wide angle" etc. before you go anywhere near the water. It can be extremely frustrating when you go for a dive (with your 1:1 extension tubes on the front of your Nikonos V, ready for a spot of macro skulduggery), to see a seal swim within about 5cm of the camera body (substitute dolphin, turtle, white shark as required). It's just as well in these situations that underwater speech is unintelligible. You can often get the general gist of the comment

by looking at the size and frequency of the bubbles emerging from the divers mouthpiece.

The solution to the single body problem of course is to get another one. (Newton's ghost may not be too impressed but there we are.)

Underwater this means you start to look suspiciously like a Christmas tree if you have even more things dangling about your person than normal. On land it means extra weight. This can be a serious constraint, at altitude for example, but with a decent photo-rucksack the advantages of extra speed and flexibility well outweigh any disadvantages (in my opinion).

A recent rip to Namibia was a case in point.

I had wanted to visit Namibia for a long time as the scenery was reported to be spectacular (it was). Parts of the country are given over to game reserves where you not only have beautiful landscapes but there were unexpected encounters with all sorts of wildlife. I realise I'm stating the obvious and that it's unwise to generalise but I tend to use wide angle lenses for landscapes and telephoto lenses for wildlife. Given the law of photography stated above changing from one lens to another in rapid succession is a nuisance, especially in an open vehicle with clouds of dust or sand in the air. It can also mean you miss a good shot. The leopard may well have stopped joggling

with the family of ground squirrels well before you get the correct lens on the camera.

The release of Nikon's range of incredibly reasonably priced new zoom lenses (of the AF 70-300mm f4.0 - 5.6 D ED) helps considerably but can't hope to solve the problem entirely. You simply have to have that other body. I often settled for an AF 35-70mm f/2.8 D on one camera and a much-loved AF 80-200mm f/2.8 on the other. If we were going on a game drive then I might well substitute my AF 300mm f/4 ED for the wide angle. (I would have liked to have substituted a 500mm or 600mm lens or even that elusive 200-400mm zoom but Father Christmas seems to have been ignoring my increasingly pathetic pleading letters for some years).

It was such a joy just swapping cameras instead of the usual faffing about with lenses.

To be honest I have to admit that most of the above is my own very long-winded excuse for buying a Nikon F5. Having justified the need for a second camera body it turned out that the only realistic candidate for the position was the F5. I forget the exact chain of thought that led me to this conclusion but I remember vividly the impeccable logic behind the argument at the time! I still remain deeply impressed by my F4S as it is a wonderful camera but I have to admit the F5 has the edge.

Swapping from one camera to the other didn't seem to cause many problems, as they are both so well designed. I occasionally fumbled for a button that had moved or a dial that wasn't there any more. I remember being quite puzzled

on one occasion because the F5 was reading 5 - at me through the viewfinder (while on aperture priority) when I was sure that I had rotated the aperture selector on the lens barrel. It dawned on me (relatively quickly) quickly that I had forgotten all about the F5's front command wheel! This was where I should have been attending to the aperture adjustment. I reminded myself that it is quite a good idea to get to know your camera gear before attempting to use it in cold blood.

In closing I would say that having a spare body is a wonderful thing. (I just wish this facility could be extended to the human counterpart) and I'm sure this comes as no surprise to readers of this distinguished periodical. Perhaps with the appearance of the F100 in the shops (sorry, or should I say, THE shop), it's a good time to consider this as an option.



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## The Nikon Legend - Part LVI

by Gray Levett

I imagine there were some raised eyebrows from certain readers when in issue no. 43 of this publication I wrote about the F3AF camera and I can appreciate why. The F3 is, amazingly, still in production, 18 years after its introduction, so why should one of the models grace the Legend series page of the *Gazette* rather than somewhere else? As I have written before I try to cover the rare, unusual and the unknown or not so well known Nikon equipment. The other criterion is that the item

must be discontinued. One day,



has every vulnerable area such as the high-eyepoint viewfinder, camera top and bottom plate, the surround of the bayonet mount known as the apron and the entire camera back made of titanium. The metal is left in its natural state known as the champagne colour.

To celebrate the release of this camera the Nikon Corporation of North America ordered the first 300 models off

the production run and supplied them complete with a 50mm f/1.4 Nikkor AIS lens with matching serial number. The camera and lens came with a dark wooden presentation box, which had a special plaque set inside the lid. There was also a certificate of authenticity suitable for framing. Occasionally we have managed to acquire one of these beautiful models, the most recent being set number 48. Serial numbers began 8200001. Incidentally, Nikon would also manufacture a version of the camera body in black with identical specification.

cameras like the FM and FE will no doubt appear on this page too when they come of age so to speak. My best explanation is that this is where Nikon camera equipment comes when it falls into any of the categories I have mentioned.

For a few years now knowledgeable collectors have been seeking mint examples of some of the special Nikon F3 models. The F3AF has already been covered and is well worthy of your attention. The other model is the F3/T. The letter 'T' signifies titanium, which is the material parts of the camera is constructed with. It was introduced in 1985. In a brochure of the time Nikon stated:

Nikon have stated that the mere shaping of titanium can be so difficult and costly that only the most meticulous manufacturers deem the effort worthwhile. If you get an opportunity to hold one of these cameras I'm sure you will think all their efforts were very worthwhile.

“Bump it. Bang it. Work it hard and long. Now the F3 is protected by titanium one of the world's strongest metals.”

The F3/T is basically an F3HP (High-Eyepoint) model, which

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**Printed by:** APP Print Services Ltd.

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