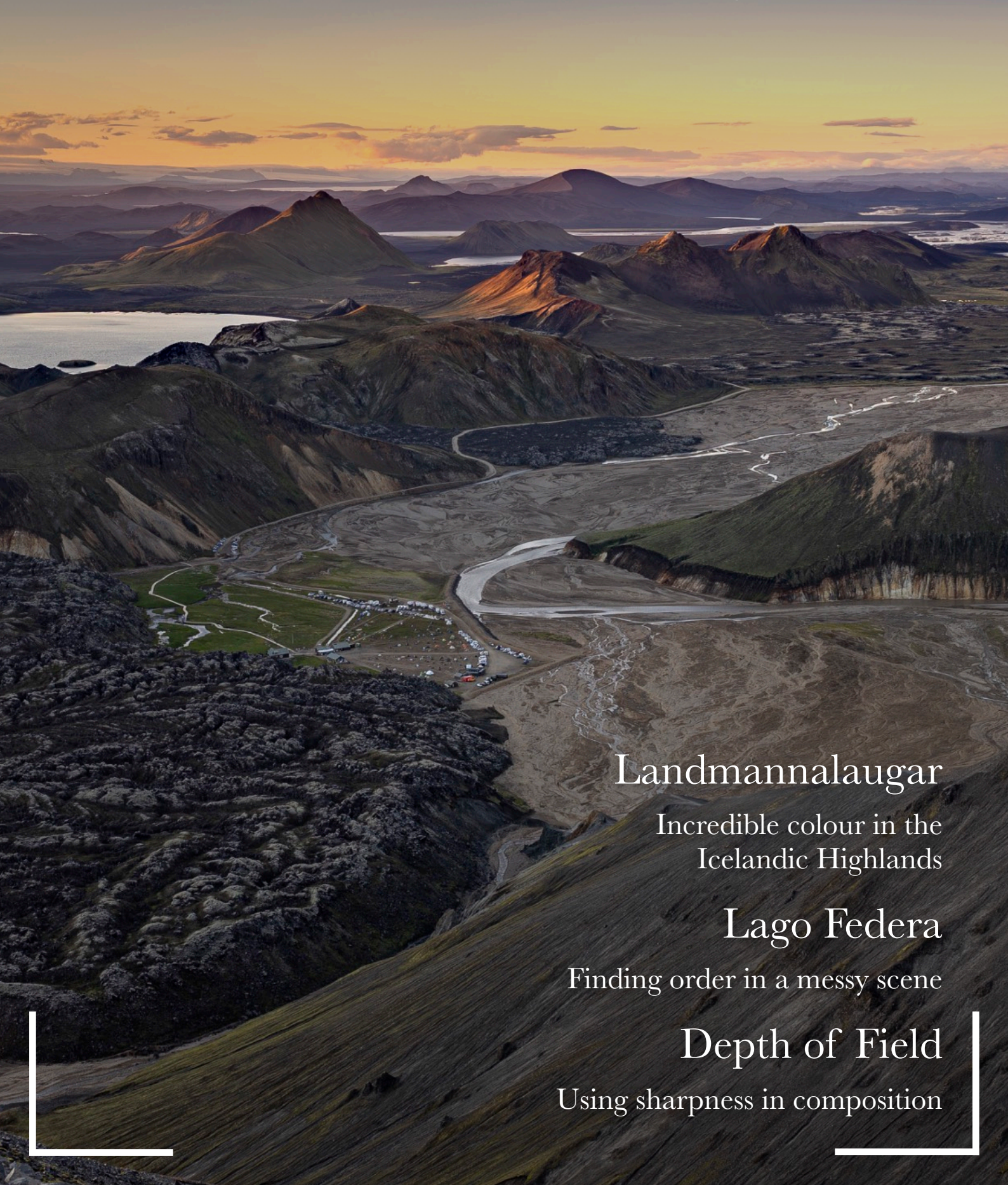


# In The Frame

June 2026



## Landmannalaugar

Incredible colour in the  
Icelandic Highlands

## Lago Federa

Finding order in a messy scene

## Depth of Field

Using sharpness in composition

# In The Frame

**June 2026**

Issue 25

*Mobile Edition*

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# Welcome

Hi, welcome to the June edition of In The Frame.

This has been a useful month of sorting and organising all the images and files that accumulate around photography and publishing, and it has been a surprisingly fun way to refresh my workspace. It's amazing how even a developed workflow can become messy over time, and how good it feels to get everything back in order when we want to think through new ideas.

I once read an article about someone who cleared out their pile of unread books because their collection of new purchases had become so intimidating that they'd stopped reading altogether. I often think about how that translates to photography, with unfinished ideas, half-processed images and collections of photographs from a trip or shoot that you always mean to go back to and finish. Sometimes the most useful creative work is not adding something new, but clearing enough space to see what is worth doing next.



# Welcome

One thing I kept noticing as I reviewed my images was the lack of woodland photography. I've been really inspired recently by images and videos from forests around the UK and the rest of the world, especially scenes with bluebells and light flowing through the trees. Among my list of goals is a plan to learn woodland photography with some deliberate practice and study. It seems like such a rewarding activity when you can start making sense of the chaos that you find among the trees.

I've also been working on a set of bonus articles about workflow, managing energy and preparing for a photography trip. I've put them in a new area called the Supporter Library, where I've gathered all previous issues of In The Frame and extra material that sits just outside the usual format. I've always enjoyed writing the magazine within the structure of a location article, an image discussion and a technique piece, but it does leave a lot of topics out of scope. The Supporter Library will be my place to collect those ideas and make the archive easier to use. There's more detail in this month's issue.



# Welcome

Some of those same ideas run through the June issue in different ways. We go on location at Landmannalaugar in Iceland, featuring some of the images I've made among these incredible colourful mountains. We're just approaching the time of year when Iceland's Highlands open up again for visitors, and the rhyolite mountains of Landmannalaugar are one of the highlights of this amazing terrain.

We also explore the process of building a composition at Lago Federa in the Dolomites, after a very early start and hike. Finally, the technique article explores how to use depth of field in photography.

I hope you enjoy the issue, and thank you for reading.

Kevin

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## Supporter Library

I recently released the Supporter Library, a new area of my website where you can download every previous issue of In The Frame, along with a growing collection of bonus articles.

Access to the Supporter Library is a one-off purchase, with no ongoing subscription. By purchasing access, you help keep the latest issue free for everyone while supporting the future of this independent project.

If you have previously bought back issues or donated to the project, please drop me an email and I'll send you a discount code so you can upgrade to Supporter Library access.

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# On Location

Landmannalaugar | Iceland



Vivid light and colour in the Highlands of Iceland



## **Introduction**

For all the dramatic features I'd explored along Iceland's coastline, there was one area I waited far too long to visit: the Highlands. I'd travelled the south coast, explored the east and west fjords, and crossed the volcanic north, but reaching the centre of Iceland is a different kind of journey. A visit to the Highlands takes more time and resilience than a typical photography trip, and making the most of it requires careful planning.

The Highlands are difficult to access for most of the year. In winter, you can only travel inland on a specialised tour using a heavily modified vehicle for the icy terrain. In summer, the roads open for a few short months, but they are still rough tracks, and most areas require a 4x4 even in the best conditions. The landscape is incredible, and some of the best photography in Iceland is found in the centre, but reaching it can be a challenge.

Most Highlands roads are designated 'F-Roads', unpaved tracks that run for hundreds of kilometres across the barren landscape. There are river crossings, long gravel stretches, and sections where only larger vehicles can handle the terrain. There are popular visitor spots, and plenty of backpackers and campers explore the Highlands each summer, yet it still feels rugged and remote.

One of the photographic highlights of the Highlands is the colourful mountain range of Landmannalaugar. There are beautiful hills that seem to change colour with the light, volcanic craters and glacial rivers snaking across the landscape, and viewpoints with expansive views in every direction. It's a famous spot for hikers and one of the most interesting places in the Highlands for photography. This article is about some of the images I've made there.



## **Finding a Route**

Reaching Landmannalaugar is part of the adventure. Thousands of hikers come to the area each year, and the limited opportunity to visit in summer concentrates tourism into a short window of a few months. However, you don't have to hike far to find space and be alone in the landscape, even when the campsite is bustling on a summer day.

Although the roads are rough, Landmannalaugar is well connected, and there are three main routes you can use to access it. From the north, a twisting road crosses volcanic terrain, and this is the easiest track to drive. There are no river crossings, several stretches of flat gravel, and you can even catch a bus from Reykjavik when the road is open.

From the west, a rougher road includes a few small river crossings. From the south is an even more difficult track, with incredible scenery but larger rivers that swell with changing conditions. One of the challenges of Highlands driving is that the rivers change over time, and a viable route one day can be impassable the next.

Landmannalaugar is barely more than 50km from the ring road, the main route circling Iceland along the coast, but the tracks into the Highlands are slow and difficult, and it can take hours to reach the campsite. The long journey and surreal landscape make the area feel far more remote than it really is, and the wild terrain builds a sense of anticipation as you approach.



## **The Landscape**

The campsite sits in a wide river basin at the foot of glowing rhyolite mountains. The peaks rise directly from the riverbed and extend for several kilometres to the west and south, with a network of trails leading over the landscape. It's a fantastic base from which to explore, with enough routes for several days of hiking.

To the west of the campsite is the Laugahraun lava field, like a frozen river of rock that you can explore on a track into the mountains. The lava field was formed by an eruption around 1477, but it still looks almost fresh, and this scar across the landscape forms a distinctive feature from surrounding viewpoints.

From ground level, the mountains look like a low range of hills, and the highest points are easily accessible. They're striking for their variety of colour, appearing in vivid shades of green, blue, yellow and red. Formed from once-molten volcanic rock, the rhyolite here set into different colours depending on mineral content and cooling speed, giving each peak its own distinct hue.

Landmannalaugar is also recognisable for the summer snow patterns across the range. The ice melts gradually around curves in the rock, forming rounded shapes that stand out brilliantly against the colour below. All these features make the area stunning for photography, and you can explore for days discovering new ideas.



## **Hiking at Landmannalaugar**

Landmannalaugar is a hiking destination, and most visitors who stay overnight are there to walk among the mountains and explore the parts of the landscape that you can only reach on foot. The campsite feels like an expedition base, with a bustling atmosphere of backpackers sorting through gear and planning the next day's adventure.

The Laugavegur Trail begins at Landmannalaugar and takes hikers on a 55km route through some of the most incredible terrain in Iceland. It ends at Thorsmork near the south coast and passes through mountains, glaciers, vast volcanic plains and pockets of woodland on a journey that is equal parts gruelling and beautiful.

This one-way trail is a major advantage of travelling to Landmannalaugar by bus, and many backpackers arrive here first, then complete their journey back to Reykjavik by catching another bus from Thorsmork.

You don't have to take on a long walk to experience the variety around Landmannalaugar, and even a single day among the mountains can reveal the unusual and often surprising features of the Highlands. The centre of Iceland is a distinctive landscape that looks almost like the stage for a fantasy film, and a good way to appreciate these details is to spend time exploring gradually on a day hike.

As a photographer, I treat hiking mainly as a practical way to reach unusual places, but it's hard not to enjoy the walks around Landmannalaugar. The trails take you quickly into more remote areas, and the focus on hiking means that most people are out during the middle of the day and back at camp when the light is at its best. Even in the peak of summer tourist season, it's not unusual to watch sunset alone at some of the most popular viewpoints in Landmannalaugar.



## **The Photography**

The main challenge for photographers at Landmannalaugar is logistics. The camping facilities are not the most luxurious in Iceland, but there are warm shower blocks, a cooking area, and a brilliant hot spring at the edge of the site. However, there is no permanent accommodation nearby, and reaching Landmannalaugar takes around two hours if you want to avoid combining photography with camping logistics.

The timing of the light makes things even harder. Since Landmannalaugar is only easily accessible in summer (you can visit in winter, but only on a specialised tour), the days are very long, with only a few short hours of darkness. Even if you camp on location, the best time to shoot is often at night, leaving you to sleep in a busy campsite during the day.

My favourite shoot at Landmannalaugar involved planning around all these factors and working through the night. Staying in a cosy cabin two hours west of Landmannalaugar, I waited for the clearest weather forecast of the trip and travelled to the mountains after lunch. I climbed the beautiful Bláhnúkur viewpoint for sunset among the colourful hills to the west, then crossed the valley during a few hours of twilight and captured the sunrise from the other direction.

Staying at Landmannalaugar would have given me more time to hike and explore, but planning a single, intense photography session allowed me to time my hiking around the light. There were incredible colours and opportunities throughout the twilight hours, and most of my time on the peaks that evening was spent shooting in near silence as the campers slept below.



There are endless shapes and patterns to explore  
where the folds of colourful terrain overlap



The summer evening sky looks almost unreal against the glowing colours of Landmannalaugar



There are still active geothermal features at Landmannalaugar, with steam rising from vents on the ancient lava field



Rough textures in the mountains catch side light from the late evening sun



## **Light and Weather**

Iceland is famously windy, with rapidly changing weather and frequent bursts of rain. Many places in the Highlands seem to catch the worst of the conditions, and it's hard to predict what will happen from one day to the next.

I've spent several separate days at Landmannalaugar, hiking the trails and looking for compositions under heavy grey skies. The landscape is defined by shapes and patterns, which provide great subjects even in poor weather, but it's hard to hike far when the rain sets in.

Although good light takes planning and a degree of luck, Landmannalaugar looks at its best under colourful sunrise and sunset skies. In summer, this period of colour can last well into the evening and begin long before dawn, and one clear night in the Highlands can be worth a week of bad weather.

As my approach to photography has changed over the years, I now spend more time choosing flexible locations and planning day trips around the weather, even if they sometimes involve a long and intense session. An overnight shoot at Landmannalaugar can be exhausting, but one experience can produce more images than several shorter visits that aren't timed around the best light.



## **Reflections**

The atmosphere at Landmannalaugar is memorable and exciting, with campers and hikers preparing gear, relaxing in the hot springs, or setting off to explore the landscape. It's a busy and popular place, but everyone who arrives has had their own adventure on the F-Roads, and it feels like a cosy temporary community, especially at night as the campsite glows in the darkness.

There are more remote and adventurous places to visit in the Highlands, but the landscape around Landmannalaugar is a great example of the terrain you find when you head inwards from Iceland's coast. The rhyolite mountains are strange and captivating, and the ancient volcanoes scattered across the plains make it feel like prehistoric earth.

Shooting overnight at Landmannalaugar was one of the most fulfilling and exciting photography adventures I've had in recent years. It came after days of waiting for the weather to break, and for a while it seemed like it might not happen as each forecast brought new bursts of rain and cloud. However, taking advantage of a break in the conditions turned out to be the best decision I made on that trip to Iceland, and even after twelve hours of shooting it was still thrilling to watch the sun rise over the landscape.

There are few places where you can watch colours shift over a scene that resembles an exaggerated fantasy painting, and perhaps the biggest challenge of photographing Landmannalaugar is ensuring that your images still feel believable. Even the raw files look slightly unreal, and many of my favourite frames were taken in a sleep-deprived, coffee-fuelled state that makes the whole experience feel surreal in hindsight. Landmannalaugar is a place that has to be seen in person, and for many, it's reason enough to travel to Iceland in summer.

# Behind the Scene

Lago Federa | Dolomites



Finding a foreground in a messy scene



## **On Location One**

The hike to Lago Federa was long, dark and steep, and it started in the middle of the night. This is one of the great sunrise spots of the Dolomites, but reaching it for the very beginning of the day requires a combination of planning and effort, however you approach it. I had chosen the version that leaned hardest on effort.

The easiest way is probably to stay at the rifugio on the lake, which lets you take your time over the walk and wake up right where you need to be, on the water's edge.

However, many rifugios in the Dolomites require advance booking, so you have little control over the conditions for a sunrise shoot the following morning.

Instead, I decided to wait until the ideal conditions were predicted and then attempt the walk from my base in Cortina d'Ampezzo. With a full week's worth of sunrises to choose from, I could target the calmest, clearest conditions for a sunrise shoot, and take much less risk over what I might find when I arrived.

The disadvantage of this plan was that I had to make the hike to Lago Federa in complete darkness. The trail is only 4km long, but it climbs 650m and starts at around 1500m, so I needed to allow at least 90 minutes to reach the lake.

During my visit in autumn, this meant leaving around 04:30 for enough time to find a composition in the early stages of twilight. Sunrise doesn't wait for photographers, and there was no time to spare as I set off with my head torch, hoping to reach Lago Federa before the first hints of colour appeared in the sky.



## **On Location Two**

Visiting a place for the first time in darkness often makes for a challenging photography shoot. I had researched Lago Federa well and knew which end of the lake to visit first, and had a few options for where I might go. However, I had no particular compositions in mind, and couldn't know exactly how the water would appear during my visit.

The north shore has the ideal view of the lake, with the peak of Becco di Mezzodì rising behind the trees in the distance. You can explore the shoreline or climb the hill overlooking the lake for a wider perspective over the forest, but I couldn't find an easy route up in the dark. Exhausted from the early start and steep hike, I decided it would be easier to focus on one area and make the best composition I could find from the edge of the lake.

I had planned the visit around a calm forecast, hoping to capture reflections on the water. As more light and colour appeared in the sky, it gradually became clear that it was going to be the ideal morning at Lago Federa. There was just enough cloud to catch the colours of twilight, with perfectly still air leaving the surface of the lake shining like a mirror.

There were plants all along the edge of the lake, and the trail around the north shore was mostly separated from clear water by layers of grass growing out of the shallows. I focused first on a patch of open water next to a platform, with an unobstructed view of the reflections in the lake. However, I wanted a more interesting composition after so much effort to reach the lake, and set off to explore how I could work with the grasses in the foreground.



## **Composition One**

Most of the northern shore of Lago Federa looked like this, with plants growing beneath the water and floating on the surface. I knew this area would help me find a more complex composition and add some variety to the images I captured that morning, but finding a coherent foreground from the tangle was going to be a real challenge.

I think it's important to be able to identify and articulate your subject in a photograph, because it helps you decide how to use it in a composition. Foreground subjects are easiest when they are specific objects, like a rock or a bunch of flowers. A foreground rock leaves you in no doubt as to what you are capturing, and you can then make choices about where to position it in the frame and how to connect it with the background.

I couldn't find any objects large or interesting enough to work in the foreground, so instead I would have to use patterns in the grass as my subject. Patterns can make an excellent subject, as they lead the eye and often have depth to explore, but they are slippery to work with because they draw attention in different ways as you change position.

These images show how I tested different amounts of grass in the foreground, moving my frame up and down to include more or less of the water's edge relative to the sky above. Too much grass, and the mountain looked small and didn't hold weight in the composition. Too little, and the foreground looked like a messy afterthought rather than a deliberate subject that I was showing to a viewer.



## **Composition Two**

As well as deciding how much of the foreground to include, I also had to pick which section of the lake to photograph.

If you are ever looking for a strange test of mental agility and perseverance, I can recommend getting up at 04:00, hiking uphill for nearly two hours in the dark and at altitude, and then trying to decide which of a collection of grass patches looks most visually appealing. Unfortunately, they don't all look the same.

As I moved around the shore, I noticed that some areas were sparser, allowing more of the reflected sky to show through the patterns in the foreground. At other points, I found larger clumps of grass, and their colour and shape held my attention more as I tried to balance them with the distant peak.

This is why patterns make such tricky foreground subjects. No one patch of grass was better than the others, but each of them introduced new features to consider. Did the shapes reflect those in the background, which would pull the image together? Did the pattern have a sense of gravity, like a set of lines leading to the same point or a particularly striking plant in the middle?

Here, the grasses on the left are more subtle, and don't distract from the peak as the primary subject. However, they don't fully hold attention and feel more like a guide into the image than their own subject. On the right, some of the grass clumps are more distinctive, and they hold our attention as an important part of the frame. However, they also dominate the composition, pulling attention away from the background.



## **Composition Three**

Often, finding a few variations on a scene is a real advantage, as we can capture a variety of images and either use them in different ways or choose between them later, with more time. However, the light was changing quickly at Lago Federa, and I only had time to focus on one or two options. It wasn't enough to find the right patch of grass, I also had to adjust this complex scene until everything was in the right place.

I spent the most time on this composition, and decided to stay there as the clouds lit up in vivid colours shortly before the sun crossed the horizon. I included the brighter and larger clumps of grass because I wanted the foreground to stand out as a deliberate subject. Perhaps I'd put so much effort into finding one that I didn't want it to become an afterthought in the photograph.

As I adjusted the composition, the biggest clumps of grass ended up in the corner of the frame. This was partly because the ground closest to the camera was muddy and unappealing, and I wanted to crop out that part of the shore. However, I also needed to balance the foreground and the mountain, and a lower position with the grasses closer to the middle made the peak shrink until it no longer felt like the main attraction.

I also made small adjustments to the position of my camera until the reflection of the peak fell into a clear patch of water. These minor details aren't always obvious on location, but the more time you spend with a photograph later, the more you notice these small features where subjects interact.

With each subject in the right place and balanced against the other, I captured several variations as the clouds lit up in shades of pink.



## **Capture and Edit**

This story is mostly about the process of getting to a difficult location for sunrise and searching for the right composition once you arrive. However, I needed to consider how the image would be edited while setting up the composition, and these raw and finished frames show how my efforts at the lake eventually turned into a complete image.

Lago Federa is surrounded by forest, so the foreground and some of the lakeside trees were very dark compared to the sky and its reflection. The ideal way to capture a scene like this is to use at least six frames: three exposure levels focused for the foreground, and the same focused for the background. This would ensure that I had the whole frame in focus, with all the detail captured in the bright and dark areas.

This kind of precision is exactly what starts to fail when you are tired from an early start and rushing to compose in the dark. However, building habits as a photographer can be important in moments like this, and I instinctively made enough frames to combine later in software.

In editing, I reduced contrast, darkened the sky, brightened the foreground, and tried to create an image with even exposure across the frame. My main subjects were all in the darker parts of the image, so I had to find a way to draw attention towards them and away from brighter features like the sky and lake.

The composition relies on the distinctive shape of the mountain and the large area of the foreground to hold attention, while the even exposure keeps the brightest parts of the scene from becoming distracting.



## **Conclusion**

There was a moment at Lago Federa when I was convinced that I wouldn't capture a good image. The conditions were perfect, and the scene from the shore was perhaps the most beautiful sight in the Dolomites that morning. However, all of this created real pressure to photograph something great, just as the challenge of reaching this remote spot had left me exhausted before I had even set up the camera.

Searching for an image at Lago Federa was one of those times when the relationship between my energy levels and creative ability was very clear. I found myself taking fairly obvious compositions of the distant mountains, similar to many scenes I had captured before. When I tried something more complex along the shore, it felt like a fuzzy process of comparing near-identical options, unable to clearly identify which one I preferred and why.

Sometimes we have to push ourselves to capture the best light in landscape photography. I could have had an easier morning by staying at the lake, but would have had less control over the conditions because the date of my visit would have been fixed. I could have started later in the day, but would have missed the best light. We can't always control how we're going to feel on location, but we do have to accept that it will affect the images we capture.

The best decision I made that morning was to try something more complex, even though it would have been easier to stick with the clear water reflections away from the grasses. During the search, I deliberately reduced my ambition to working through one or two good compositions, rather than mindlessly snapping lots of options for later review, which was definitely more tempting at the time.

Shooting while tired is a balance between relying on our photography habits formed through experience, but also pushing beyond them to make the most of a new place. The first two images in this article show the results of my photography habits, but this more creative option felt like a better achievement.

# Depth of Field

Controlling sharpness to shape a composition





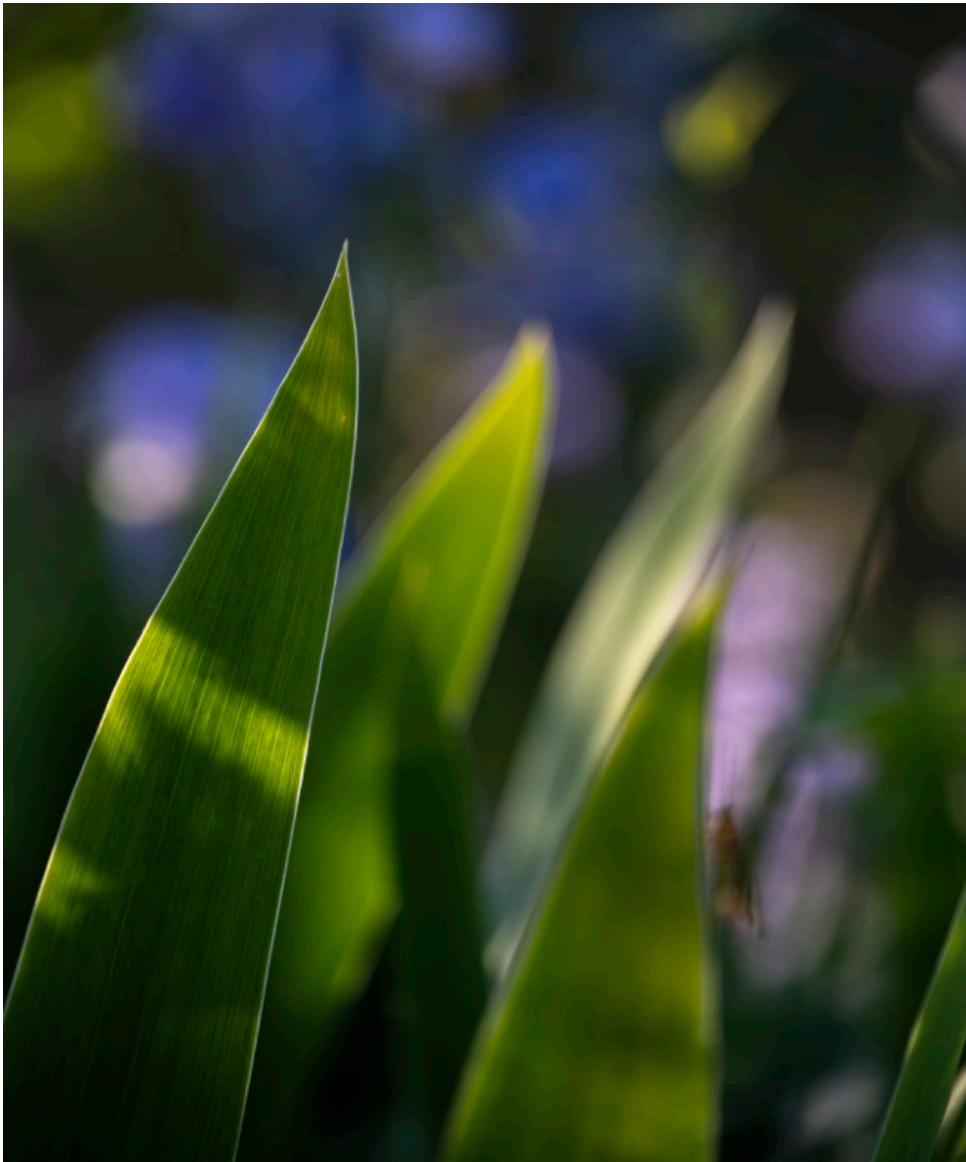
## **Introduction**

Depth of field is one of the most important aspects of capturing an image, and one we often learn about at the same time as the basic settings of aperture and shutter speed. Depth of field affects how much of a photograph appears sharp, which changes how viewers interpret the scene and which areas capture attention. Learning to manage depth of field is an essential part of deciding how a photograph should work.

Most of us encounter depth of field when we discover the impact of different settings, including the way wider apertures create a shallower area of sharpness. We might experiment with it as a way to create a blurry background, and recognise the compromise between letting more light onto the sensor and keeping the scene in focus.

However, we can go much further with depth of field, and consider it in relation to other features of creating a photograph. On location, I'm often thinking about whether the foreground should hold attention, what role the background should play, and how to deal with distracting parts of the scene. Depth of field can help us achieve many different effects, and we should think about it as part of composition, not just as a technical setting applied once the frame has been set.

Sometimes, exploring one of the foundational topics in photography reveals more than we initially expect, and it took me a long time to come back to depth of field as something more than a basic camera setting. This article will look at how depth of field works, the factors that affect it, how to use it deliberately in the field, and what to do when it becomes a limiting factor in the shot we want to make.



## **How Depth of Field Works**

This article mostly deals with depth of field as a compositional tool, but it's important to understand how it works. Lenses can only focus at a single distance, so we must choose a focal point when capturing an image. Modern cameras have increasingly sophisticated ways of managing focus, from subject detection to small movable focus points. However, these systems are only for deciding where to place focus, and the result still has to be a single focus distance.

Focus works across a plane, so everything that lies along the same plane of focus will appear sharp. Specialist tilt-shift lenses can change the angle of that plane, but for most lenses and most situations, the important point is that focus is still based around a specific slice through the scene.

Everything in front of or behind the plane of focus is technically out of focus, but depth of field refers to the zone on either side where detail still appears acceptably sharp. Sharpness works on a spectrum, and things immediately off the focal plane will be slightly less sharp. However, the effect increases with distance; the further a subject is from the focal plane, the less sharp it will be.

We refer to this zone of acceptable sharpness as depth of field, and we can control its size by the way we set up the camera. The main impact comes from aperture, with wider apertures creating a shallower depth of field and narrower ones creating a deeper zone of acceptable sharpness. However, focusing closer to the camera reduces depth of field, and longer focal lengths make the sharpness drop-off more obvious.

For wide-angle images focused far from the camera, depth of field is not a big consideration. For images with subjects close to the camera, or for those taken with a long lens, a small change in aperture can have a big impact on sharpness.



## **Choice or Limitation?**

There's an important distinction in how we use depth of field that is often overlooked: sometimes it's a deliberate choice, and sometimes it's a limitation to be managed. We always have to think about depth of field and make decisions to manage it, but it helps to recognise whether you are using it for a creative effect or trying to maintain as much sharpness as possible.

A shallow depth of field can be helpful for isolating subjects against a background, subtly drawing attention to parts of a frame, or reducing the influence of a distraction in the composition. A greater depth of field can be just as deliberate when the aim is to hold several parts of the scene together. It's a useful part of the photographer's toolkit, and can allow us to create compositions out of scenes that otherwise might not work.

There are other times when we want a whole scene to be sharp, and are thinking more about depth of field as a limitation that prevents us from capturing the image as we want it. This often happens when you want to combine a nearby foreground feature with a distant background subject. If the foreground and background are far enough apart, focusing on one may leave the other looking noticeably soft.

This distinction can inform the decisions we make about our photograph. If we're using depth of field deliberately, we might open the aperture to make it shallower, and pay extra attention to our focal point. If we're trying to avoid unwanted softness, we might reframe, adjust settings or use special techniques to increase the overall sharpness of the scene. Once you recognise which mode you are working in, it becomes much easier to decide whether to lean into softness, change the composition, or find a technical solution.



## **Using Depth of Field Deliberately**

A shallow depth of field can work as a creative technique when we want to guide a viewer, manipulate textures or create an atmosphere. We don't see the world with a shallow depth of field because our eyes are constantly adjusting focus, while our minds fill in the blanks. That means any photograph with a shallow depth of field starts with an act of imagination. Most of the time, we need to consciously decide to use a shallow depth of field, and then build a mental image of how the photograph will turn out.

A shallow depth of field can be a useful approach to simplification, and any busy or cluttered scene can act as a reminder that we might want to try adjusting it. If we're struggling to pick out subjects or find connections between them, a shallow depth of field gives us a way of reducing the options by softening everything outside the sharpest part of the image. We aren't always trying to blur the background, but sometimes to remove choices and deal with fewer subjects.

Depth of field is also a useful way to isolate subjects, especially when there are few other options. When I have found a subject for an image, one of my first considerations is how to make it stand out from its surroundings, and that usually involves some form of contrast, such as light against dark or one colour against another. Depth of field gives us a new option, sharpness against softness, and allows us to create separation even when the subject does not naturally stand out.

Shallow depth of field is partly a photographic illusion, but it is so common in photography that we often perceive it as a natural way to manipulate how an image appears. It's about much more than blurring a background for effect. When we use it consciously to simplify a complex scene or create isolation for our subject, it can give us new ways to compose and new creative effects to apply.



## **Managing Depth of Field**

Many photographs don't start with depth of field, and we only consider it after choosing our subjects, framing and position. We may want to maximise sharpness across the scene, which is a complex topic involving many different factors. Depth of field can be one of the most important compromises to consider when choosing settings.

Once we have chosen the subject, focal length, camera position and point of focus, aperture becomes the main setting for changing how much of the scene appears sharp. Narrower apertures create a wider depth of field, so increasing the f-number will lead to more of the scene appearing in focus. However, diffraction causes lenses to become softer overall as aperture narrows, and gradually the benefits of a wider depth of field are offset by a general loss of sharpness.

Optimal sharpness varies with each lens, but it's often around f/8 to f/11. Wider apertures than this narrow the depth of field and reduce how much of the scene appears sharp. Smaller apertures reduce overall sharpness, even at the focal point. For many scenes, an aperture around f/8 to f/11 is a good starting point when we want good overall sharpness.

If we have maximised the sharpness we can achieve by adjusting aperture and decided that it's still not enough for the scene we want to capture, we might be able to adjust something else. We can focus slightly further into the scene, which may make more of the middle distance and background appear sharp, but at the cost of sharpness in the nearest subjects. We could reframe with a wider focal length or more distant subjects if the change in composition is worth the extra detail we'd achieve. However, if none of these options are viable, we might have to use focus stacking.



## **Focus Stacking**

Focus stacking is a special technique that allows us to create an image with more apparent depth of field than could be achieved with a single shot. Instead of relying on one focus point and one area of sharpness, we take multiple frames with focus placed at different distances through the scene. Each frame contains a different area of sharpness, and we can merge them in software to create a final image using the sharpest parts of each one.

To create the frames you need for focus stacking, it helps to have your camera on a tripod, with the composition and settings kept fixed throughout the process. You take one frame focused on the nearest important subject, then additional ones focused deeper into the scene until the set of images covers everything that needs to appear sharp. Most software is flexible and can combine several frames to recover sharpness from different parts of it. However, it helps to overlap areas of sharpness so you don't get soft gaps between them in the final result. This is easier if you still choose an aperture that gives each frame a useful amount of depth of field before starting.

You can find dedicated focus-stacking software, and Adobe Photoshop can also be used for the same process. First you need to align your source frames, which can usually be done automatically. The focus-stacking software or function will then identify the sharpest areas and combine the frames into a completed image.

Focus stacking doesn't work well if parts of your scene are moving, as the source frames need to match. However, much of the time this technique can allow us to achieve more sharpness without making other compromises with our settings. The main challenge is the effort it takes to capture multiple frames with different focus points and merge them before we can start editing the image. Spending more time perfecting one photograph means that we have less time to explore for others, so this technique is best saved for important scenes where complete sharpness really matters.



## **Conclusion**

Depth of field is much more than a simple relationship between the aperture we choose and the amount of the scene that appears sharp. It is affected by focal length, focus distance, aperture and framing, and each of those choices changes how much of the image appears sharp. Although it's a relatively technical idea, we can use it to simplify a scene, create separation or guide a viewer as a deliberate part of the composition.

When making an image, we are usually trying to maximise sharpness or choosing a depth of field that matches what we want to show in the composition. Knowing which of those two modes we are in can help us decide which lens, focus point, frame and settings to use. Controlling depth of field often requires a few test shots to fully understand what is in focus, while maximising sharpness might mean using a technique like focus stacking to expand the capabilities of your gear.

I'm still finding new ways to experiment with depth of field. Recently, I've been looking for situations where an out-of-focus foreground can add depth or atmosphere, which often works when flowers or grasses are moving nearby. In the past, I tested ways of blurring the background just enough that you can still recognise the features of a scene, hinting at the place without showing it in detail. This works particularly well in a distinctive landscape, such as Tuscany or Iceland, where a viewer can still interpret the soft areas of the photograph. Understanding the concept of depth of field is relatively simple, but finding creative ways to apply it is endlessly interesting.

Next time you are out with the camera, it's worth trying a few experiments with depth of field to see what new creative options it can give you. It also helps to try a focus stack if you've never done one before; the process is much easier than it sounds. The important step is to stop treating depth of field as a camera setting, and start thinking of it as one of the choices that shape the photograph.



## Thanks for Reading

I hope you liked this issue of In The Frame, and I'd love to hear any feedback or ideas for what the magazine might cover in the future. If you'd like to support this project and help me continue to write about travel and photography, there are a few ways you can contribute.

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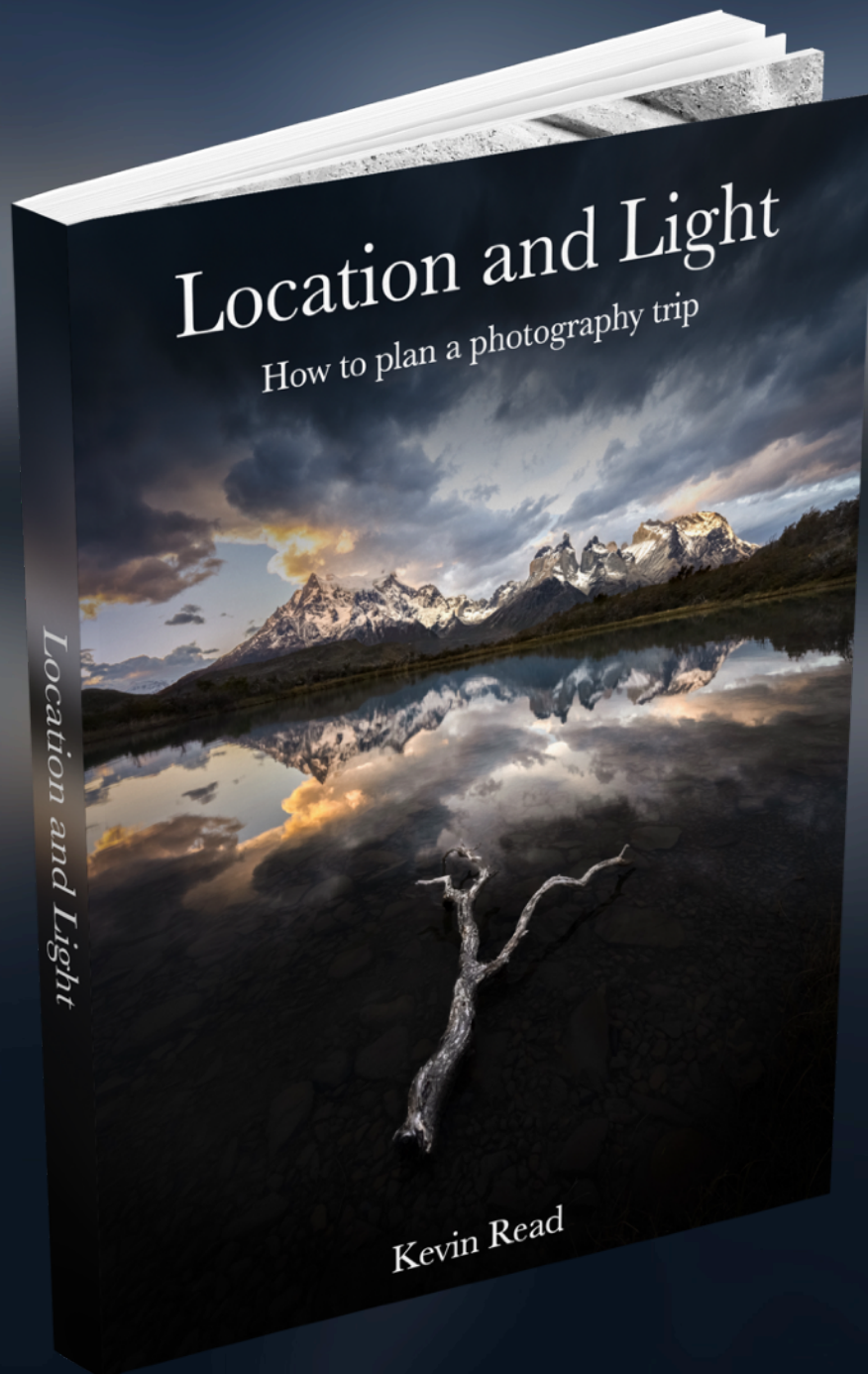
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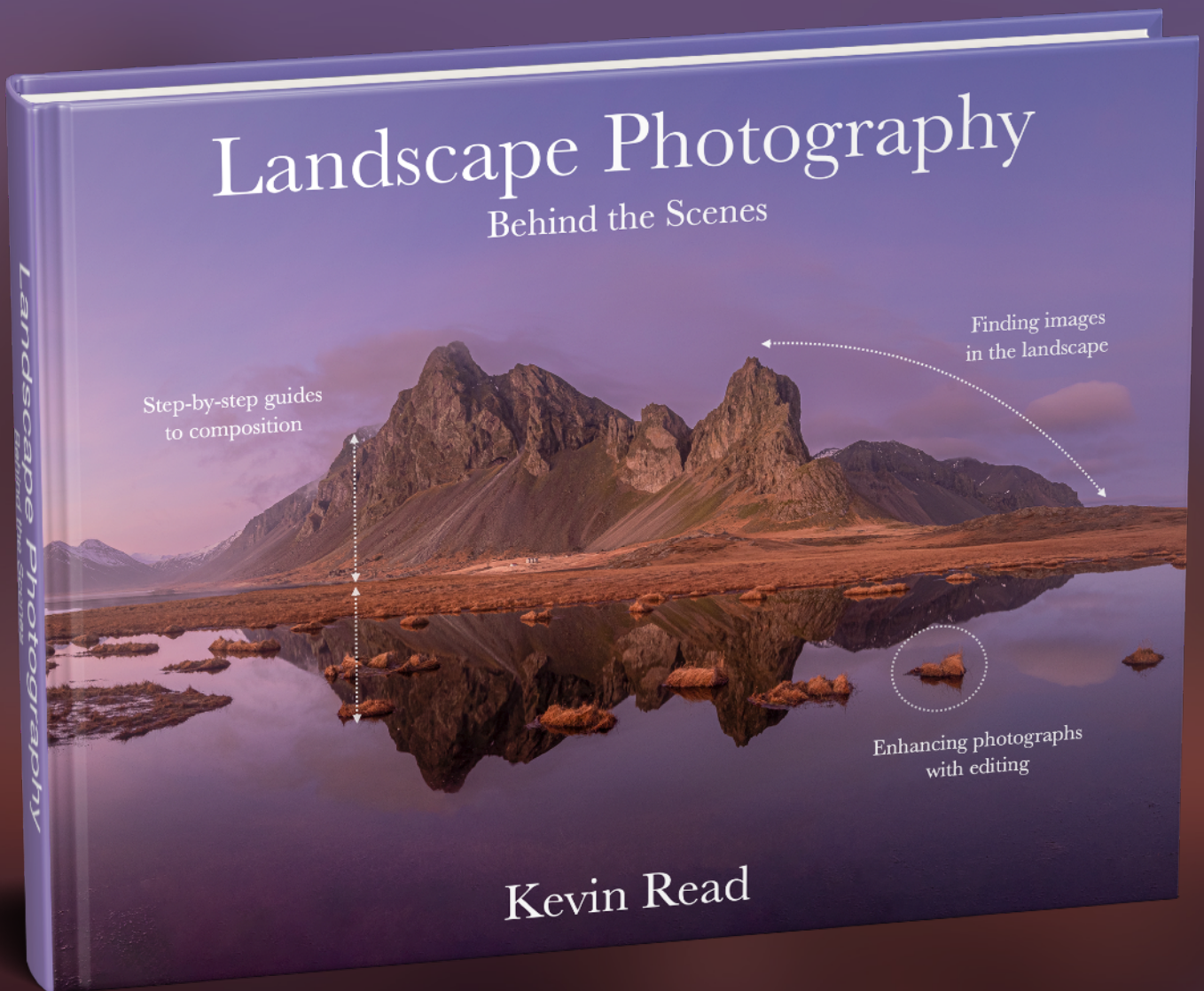


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