



What is photography to you? Is it something you do in passing or only on holiday? Is it pastime that you do now and again? Perhaps it's a creative outlet that you need to participate in. Or are your photographs merely a commodity that is putting bread on your table and a roof over your head? Then again, maybe it's your reason for living and photography occupies all of your thoughts, words and deeds in some way, shape or form.

How important is photography to you? On a scale of 0 - 10 most readers of this ramble will probably fall somewhere between five and ten. Over time, as we become more experienced and skilful photographers, we may creep even further towards the right hand index, possibly getting surprisingly close to the mythical ten out of ten.

Your style or genre of photography is no barrier to becoming an obsessive in the eyes of friends and family who don't understand you - or your photography. They can't get their head round the idea of taking a camera everywhere you go, and I mean everywhere. Or how you are always thinking about the next great image you are about to get, or getting depressed at the abysmal failure of your last miserable effort that fell short of your exacting

standards. Nor can they understand why saying something like, "It looks really good to me." doesn't help at all.

Folk just have to accept that photography is what you do and a photographer is who you are.

So, what do you think would happen if you couldn't take any photographs? I'm not talking about a flat battery or full memory cards, but a longer term situation, such as where your ability to use a camera is restricted by perhaps illness or, as in my case, injury.

Well, if my experience is anything to go by you can expect the most unpleasant of times.

In the period that I was under doctors orders the heather on my local moors that I had been eagerly monitoring came into full flower, painting the hillsides pink and purple, and faded away to dull brown. Male red grouse began to reappear after family rearing duties and for a short time put on some stunning performances of calls, struts and raised eyebrows. For a couple of weeks a sparrowhawk chose my garden as a place to come and rest a while, to the consternation of an army of regular freeloaders used to unlimited access to seed and nut feeders. An intermittent Indian summer produced light displays that were majestic, outrageous and spectacular as they fleetingly danced their way across the North York Moors. Sunrises were often extravagant with a blanket of colour stretching from horizon to horizon. All of these came and went before my camera-less eyes, adding to an already significant sense of frustration at a seeming endless list of missed opportunities.

The one good thing that I eventually learnt during this time was how to be patient and enjoy the simple pleasure of looking, without a camera in sight. Perhaps now would be a good time to make a determined effort to move a little more towards one rather than ten on the "how important is photography to me" index.