

The Heights of Torridon

AN AUTUMN LANDSCAPE AND MACRO PHOTOGRAPHY RETREAT
IN NORTH-WEST SCOTLAND, 4 - 11 TH NOVEMBER 2020

FOOD AND
PHOTOGRAPHY
RETREATS

with the Benxies

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The Retreat

Food and Photography Retreats are for people who enjoy a house-party style holiday in a lovely setting where they can immerse themselves totally in photography - and eat very well too.

Niall and Charlotte Benvie's seven day Photo Retreat in the Torridon region of north-west Scotland offers guests the chance to learn new skills and deepen their knowledge of photography while enjoying first class hospitality in a Highland setting.

The concept of a Photo Retreat is a little different from a tour or workshop. The Retreat has elements of both but the tuition is more structured and a lot of emphasis is put on creating a relaxing atmosphere in which conversation can flow and ideas emerge. Importantly, we are in the same base all week. We will help you to advance your photography by teaching you particular techniques and ways of thinking that you can use long after the Retreat has finished. This, combined with tutorials and feed-back sessions, can help you to make substantial progress in you creative life, all the while enjoying yourself in an inspiring setting.

On this Retreat, we will be on location for first and last light - not such an onerous task at this time of year.



What's on offer

The mountains and lochs of Torridon, while less well-known than other parts of the Scottish Highlands, are none the less impressive. As well as the obvious vistas, the area contains a rich assemblage of peat-stained burns and quartzite summits, eccentric pines and golden bogs, silent lochs and pallid shores. This diversity provides the raw material for your creative work.

During the Retreat, you will learn how to:

- assemble "Chocolate Bar" collages;
- create "Colour Transects", to add to your landscape repertoire;
- create mood at the post-production stage and;
- light paint.

These techniques open doors to creative avenues that you'll be able to explore for years after - the same techniques that have earned Niall his reputation as an innovator over a 25 year career.

Our discussion sessions will centre around how to hold the viewer's interest as well as how these ideas might be adapted. Niall guides these but everyone is encouraged to contribute their own ideas.

Photography, of course, is just one part of the Retreat. Charlotte belongs to the nothing-is-too-much-trouble school of hospitality and relishes the chance to create a delightful space and lovely meals for you.



Skills

Post-production for mood

The right post-production is essential for projecting the mood you are aiming for in your work. Initially, we will look at the principles that govern how you should treat an image. After that, we'll go beyond simple image development and explore the tools available to create an image more personal to you, using Lightroom, Photoshop and AlienSkin Exposure X - arguably the leading software for this kind of work.



Skills

Colour Transects

Niall started to create this style of image in 2017 and they have been widely published since. A "Colour Transect" consists of a photograph and colour swatches presented as a single piece of work. The 27 swatches are sampled from the photograph, sometimes highlighting the diversity of colours in the image, sometimes the variety of different hues of the one colour. The object is to simplify and clarify the image's colour content for the viewer.

The concept of the transect is borrowed from ecological sampling. A line is defined through a habitat and samples taken or records made at regular intervals along that line. The exercise can be repeated at different times on the same transect to introduce consistency to the sampling process. In a Colour Transect, lines are drawn across the image at the post production stage and colours sampled to create the swatches.

Colour Transects provide an opportunity to re-interpret familiar themes and to put your personal stamp on them, be they in the forest or on the mountains and moors. We provide easy-to-use Photoshop templates to make the creation of these intriguing images a breeze.



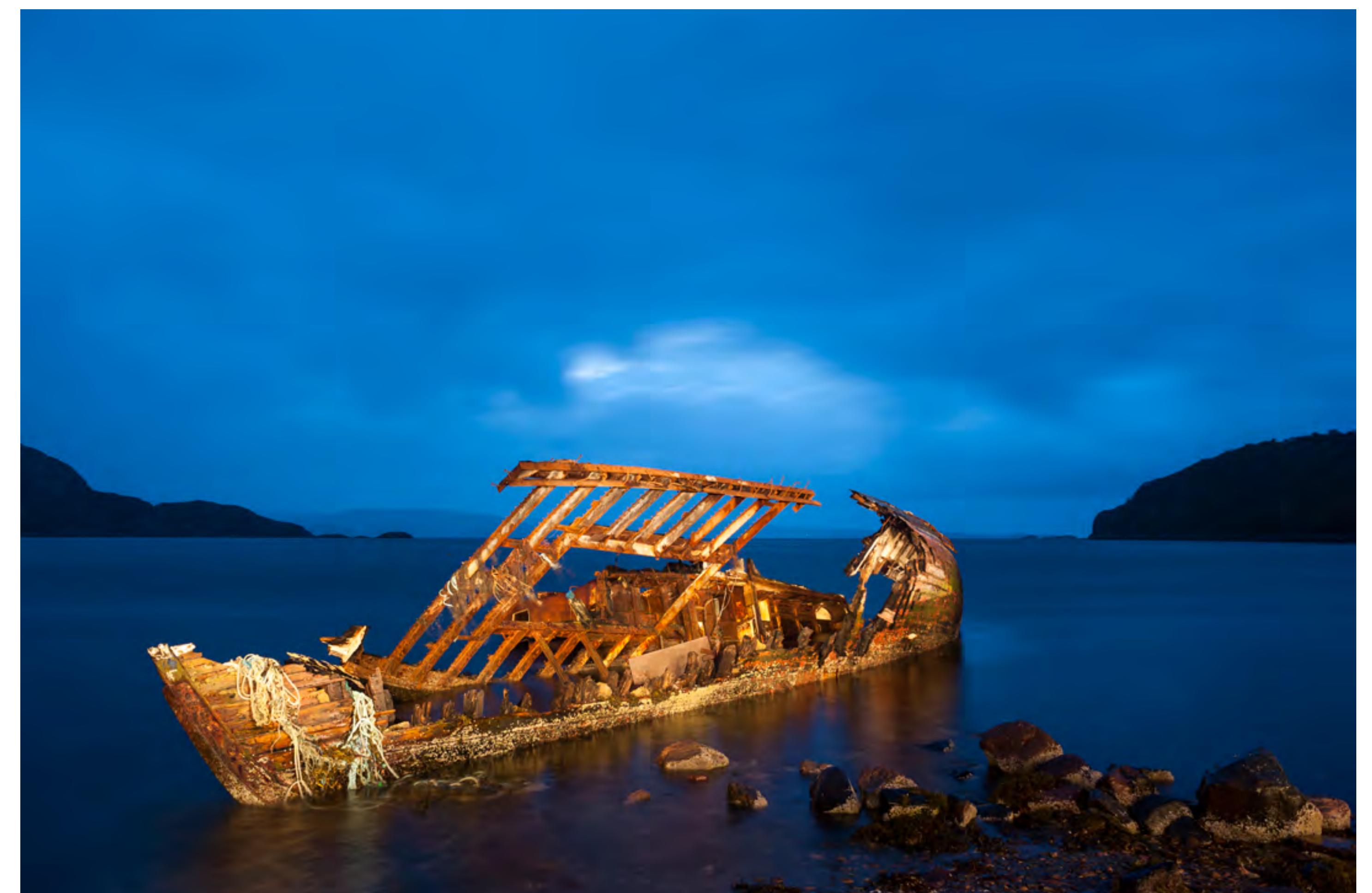
*57.409° N
colour transect #17*

Skills

Light painting

Light painting involves illuminating parts of a scene during a long exposure with a powerful torch, just as night is falling. When it's done well, the result is a lovely blend of warm and cool hues, with the subject standing out boldly. Regardless of the day's weather, we can always be assured a rich, velvet-blue sky at dusk - a perfect counterpoint to the light "painted" on the subject. It's also a great way to highlight particular elements in the landscape while down-playing others.

The exercise involves arriving a little before dusk so that you can frame your composition and determine focus while it is still light enough to see. Using the same settings, the group waits until it is almost dark before making the first exposure, with Niall applying light to the scene. He then assesses and suggests adjustments for each guest before carrying on. Normally he uses tungsten light, sometimes mixing it with a little LED light to create a cool contrast.



TORRIDON & BEINN EIGHE

AND OUR VENUE



Torridon and Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve

Over the last 14 years, Niall has spent a lot of time in this area, shooting personal work and commissions for the government agency, Scottish Natural Heritage. It manages this, the UK's first National Nature Reserve, founded in 1951 in recognition of its internationally important flora - principally of mosses, lichens and liverworts. It is also a redoubt of the once vast Scots pine forest that covered much of the Scottish Highlands for thousands of years but which has been reduced to a few scraps and remnants. At Beinn Eighe, we can see the work being done to re-establish a corridor of woodland from the pine-clad slopes above Loch Maree, down the length of Glen Torridon, to join with other fragments of old forest around Shieldaig.

Mountains built from Torridonian sandstone, capped by glistening quartzite, seem to fill the sky. While it's not necessary to climb to gain a good vantage point, doing so can bring its own rewards, if the fitness of the group permits. The summits conjure with clouds rushing in from the Atlantic to produce squalls then drizzle then brilliant sunshine then hail - all within an hour. On other days it is utterly still and the dark lochs fill with reflections of emergent plants and sombre mountains. It's as if the whole landscape is holding its breathe: a time to be quiet ourselves and get a sense of the endurance of life here.



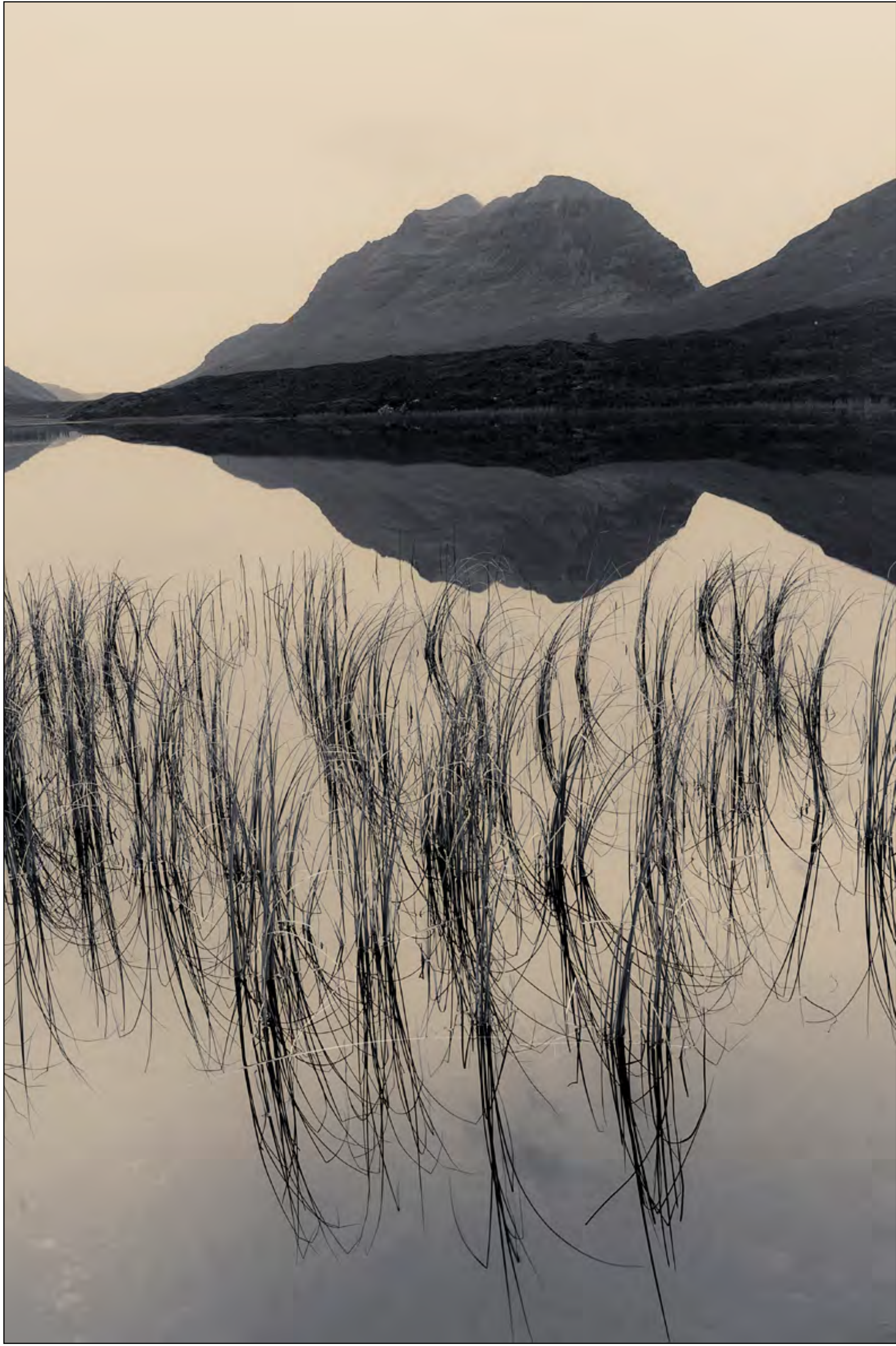
Our venue

Our base for the week will be in the village of Annat at the head of Upper Loch Torridon. Located within easy reach of many of our key locations, Ferroch House and cottage sit back from the road, overlooking the saltmarshes and over towards Ben Alligin on the north side of Loch Torridon. Each room has an en-suite bathroom, there is wi-fi throughout, a spacious lounge for tutorials and processing, log fires and losing yourself in the small library of photography books we bring for the Retreat. Sounds like a holiday!

Meals

Good food is at the heart of our Retreats, from breakfast through to after-dinner chocolates, all made by Charlotte. You can see some sample menus at the end of this document. She uses local ingredients, when they are available, in dishes that are delicious and imaginative without being fussy. We expect you to be hungry after a cold day in the field. Food allergies and intolerances are catered for sensitively but must be notified in advance on the booking form to give her time to prepare an alternative menu for you. Expect to eat well, for breakfast, lunch and dinner. And in between times too.





General information

Retreat Price: £2150

What is included in the price of the Retreat?

Seven nights' accommodation at Ferroch House, Annat, Achnasheen IV22 2EU; dinner on day one until breakfast on the last day; travel between locations by mini-bus; transfers between Inverness airport (INV)/ railway station and our accommodation at the pre-arranged time; and tuition and course notes from Niall.

What is not included in the price of the Retreat?

Travel between your home and Inverness; transfers at times other than those specified; alcoholic drinks; insurance for you and your possessions during the Retreat; additional entrance fees we may incur.

Travelling to and from the Retreat

The Retreat starts at the Inverness where Niall will meet you at Arrivals at the airport or at the entrance to the railway station (Station Square). You may choose instead to drive directly to Ferroch House. If so, let us know ahead of time and we will give you directions. At the end of the Retreat, you will be taken back to the airport or railway station.

Daily routine

Each evening we publish the plan for the next day, based on three different weather forecasts. The sun rises at about 0750 hrs and sets a little after 1600 hrs at this time of year so we will spend most of the day outside, leaving plenty of time to do our other work after dark. We believe it's important to strike a good balance between field and studio time so that you can work with, and receive feed-back on, your photographs. Niall will also be conducting "surgeries" during the week; each guest has a 30 minute uninterrupted "appointment" to discuss a particular photographic problem or interest.

Your safety during the Retreat

We treat your safety seriously on our Retreats. While most of the locations we visit present few difficulties to those with even just average fitness, where particular hazards - such as slippery surfaces, boggy ground or drop-offs - present themselves, you will be properly briefed first so that you can make a decision about how to proceed. If we work beside the road at dusk or dawn, we ask you to wear one of the high visibility vests we provide for the week. We also issue each guest with a Motorola two-way radio so they can keep in touch if they wander off and need to attract Niall's attention. Walks do not normally exceed five kilometres and are usually a lot shorter.

General information

Insurance

It is a requirement of booking that guests provide evidence of personal travel insurance to cover cancellation and curtailment, medical and emergency expenses (including repatriation), personal accident, injury and death in addition to loss of/damage to luggage and possessions, personal possessions and flight cancellations/delays.

Weather

The average November temperatures in this part of the Highlands are a high of 9° C and a low of 3° C. We are unlikely to have snowfall at lower levels and can expect there still to be quite a lot of autumn colour. The wind can be penetrating and strong, especially if we climb.

Clothing

Expect it to be cold first thing in the morning and in the late afternoon. And it could be wet in between times. And cold. A waterproof shell jacket with down jacket, waterproof trousers, a warm hat and fold-back mitts with liners will keep you dry and snug. It is wet under-foot so Wellington boots are useful, except on longer walks. Hiking boots should be properly proofed. You could bring slippers/ indoor shoes for the house.

Equipment

If you are travelling by air, you will be able to bring more into the cabin if you carry it in a photographer's vest with large pockets, in addition to your carry-on bag. With regards to equipment you'll need during the Retreat:

- If possible, please bring a laptop loaded with Adobe Lightroom (or your preferred RAW converter) and Photoshop/Elements. We find processing on iPads with Lightroom CC is too limiting.
- A macro lens, a mid-range zoom and a moderate wide-angle will get most use.
- We may have an opportunity to photograph red deer in which case a lens over 300 mm will come into its own.
- However inconvenient it seems, a tripod is a must.
- A head torch or hand-held one, for navigation and safety.
- All the chargers, cards, batteries and backup media you need, plus UK power adaptor if you're travelling from abroad.
- A polarizing filter and graduated ND's, only if you have them.

We'd really like to see your favourite photographs - the ones you're most proud of. Please bring five, full resolution JPEGs for showing on the first evening.

General information

About us

After many years leading tours and workshops for other companies at home and abroad Niall and Charlotte Benvie established Food and Photography Retreats in 2018. Our offer combines the teaching of particular skills in attractive locations with great hospitality, conversation and food.

Niall has been a professional photographer, writer designer and guide for over 25 years with a massive publication record including seven books and hundreds of articles. He has been involved in founding and running several of the biggest outdoor photographic initiatives of the last decade, including Meet Your Neighbours, Wild Wonders of Europe and 2020VISION.

For 28 years, Charlotte combined a career in the Civil Service with freelance catering and hosting roles before coming to work with husband, Niall. Guests value not only her expertise in the kitchen and dining room but her attention to detail and warmth. She has a keen eye for a picture too and can also assist with Lightroom processing. She is a trained chocolatier and has won several Great Taste Awards (The Guild of Fine Food) for her work.

Contact us

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Sample menus

from the kitchen of
Charlotte

MENU

TUESDAY 20TH NOVEMBER, 2018



A surprise from the kitchen



Baked leeks with tarragon crumble,
roasted carrots and crushed new potatoes
with broccoli



Apricot brioche pudding,
accompanied by a shot of
aperitif noix

from the kitchen of
Charlotte

MENU

THURSDAY 22ND NOVEMBER, 2018



A surprise from the kitchen



Slow-roasted tomato and puy lentil
lasagne, green salad and garlic bread



Lemon four ways
accompanied by a shot of
limoncello

from the kitchen of
Charlotte

MENU

SATURDAY 24TH NOVEMBER, 2018



A surprise from the kitchen



Venison chilli and basmati rice
with avocado and lime salsa



Chocolate mousse with an almond tuile
accompanied by a shot of
Montbazillac