



PHOTOGRAPHING THE WILD BLUE MOUNTAINS

Environmentalist and
photographer Ian Brown

Few people, even those who are passionate about the environment in which they live, see their surroundings as vividly and in the same intricate detail and changing moods as the wilderness photographer.

Bushwalker, naturalist and environmentalist Ian Brown's images illustrated the successful Blue Mountains World Heritage submission to UNESCO in 2000. Wellknown for his passionate views on the environment, he has worked as a ranger and field manager for National Parks and Wildlife Service and today works in environmental consulting, natural heritage interpretation and photography, undertaking many projects concerned with promoting, presenting and managing the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

As a photographer, Ian Brown is strongly influenced by the traditions of landscape, nature and wilderness photography as well as by artists in other visual media, such as painting. There is, however, a fundamental difference between photography and the other visual arts. Rather than being in control of their subject matter, photographers must apply their vision and skill to a constantly changing environment.

Brown says: 'In my experience, those magical images that we all seek are very rare indeed, but opportunity favours the prepared. You must be there!' And he rejects the notion that nature photography is not 'art' because all the photographer is doing is recording what is there.

Nature photography is a challenging discipline. First you must 'see', then find a composition that works, then try to capture it in the best, most interesting or most illustrative conditions. 'I often return to the same places to improve my images because no place is ever the same twice,' he says.

Brown treks into the wildest places often for several days at a time. He goes alone, carrying 20 kg and more of camera and camping gear, immersing himself in the environment and seeking out the different and surprising, away from the tourist viewpoints and walking tracks, often in conditions of fleeting light, changeable seasons and weather. 'I find the wildest places are the most inspiring,' he says. 'I'm constantly surprised, bewildered and amazed at the diversity and beauty of the Blue Mountains landscape, its rocks, forests, streams and life.' His preference is to work with film and a large format camera 'because it is such an enjoyable and contemplative process', but also uses digital cameras which are often more practical.

Brown is concerned with the growing trend to improve or re-interpret nature with overblown saturation and contrast, even fakery of photographs. 'This didn't start

with digital photography,' he argues, 'but has become an epidemic even amongst very fine photographers. I see this exaggeration as dishonest and philosophically fraught. I certainly process my images to optimise them, but I always try to keep it 'real'. Integrity and respect for nature are important to my purpose and ethos.'

Ian Brown's consummate skill as a wilderness photographer is the tool he uses to pursue his environmental work. 'I try to capture subjects that inspire me as faithfully and skilfully as I can, in the hope that my images also inspire others about wild nature, its inherent value and its importance to humanity's future, our very soul.'

The Wild Blue Mountains Calendar is a project which enables Brown to reinforce this passionate statement annually and very beautifully. In its fifth year, the calendar is a high quality production with a small print run, in effect a limited edition and a collector's item. It is not a commercial proposition as Brown says, but is 'just something I have a need to do'. Each edition requires thirteen strong new images, preferably across a variety of interesting themes—spectacular landscapes, forest scenes, streams and details.

Ian Brown has lived in the Blue Mountains for over forty years and has been photographing the region for more than twenty years. There are few who know this land as well.



'I try to capture subjects that inspire me as faithfully and skilfully as I can, in the hope that my images also inspire others about wild nature, its inherent value and its importance to humanity's future, our very soul.'