

Cross Fell - Lucky Moments

“You must be *so* patient!” I hear this a lot and little could be further from the truth. Those who know me well know that patience is just not part of my personality but sheer bloody-minded determination is. It would be a rare sight indeed to come across me sitting patiently waiting for the right light. However, once I ‘identify’ something I know I want to photograph, I’ll be waiting for the best time/light conditions/season etc and will then doggedly return until everything is right. That’s quite often a year or so later. I rarely take opportunistic photos on the hoof – I work pretty much to a plan. I reckon taking top-notch photos is more about organisation, working out how to be in the right place at the right time, than either patience or luck. Luck *can* happen – a rainbow magically appears or whatever – but it’s far more likely when the planning is right.

On this, my latest ‘assignment’, I chose to go up Cross Fell. The day was planned to some extent and I knew the views would be good. However I had a lucky moment, a serendipitous gift of some unexpectedly magical light, exactly when I needed it. I chose Cross Fell on this midwinter occasion to avoid the problem of the low December sun. Many areas of the central Lakes are cast into gloomy shadow from relatively early in the day. Take Buttermere for example – high mountains to the south and the west effectively block off so much sun, especially in the afternoon. My answer to this is to head either to the Coast, the Southern Lakes – places like Kentmere enjoying relatively good midwinter sunshine – or, even better, the Pennines and the higher the better. Hence Cross Fell; rising above the relatively flat ground of the Eden Valley to the west, it benefits in particular from great late afternoon sunshine.

This walk, on a bitterly cold and extremely windy day was challenging, to put it mildly, and I decided for once to take only one camera and one zoom lens. I also decided not to take my tripod but to concentrate instead on carrying survival stuff like extra clothes, flasks and so on. Leaving the tripod somehow felt wrong, not doing things ‘properly’. However, it taught me a lesson that the photos still look sharp enough – something I could never have achieved with my previous medium format film cameras. O.K., so the photos wouldn’t enlarge to poster size but they’re fine for most purposes. And in any case, putting a tripod up in snow is usually a bit daft.



Descending from the summit, the view of snow showers crossing the Eden Valley. The Howgills and the eastern fells of the Lake District are in the far distance. The photo was taken with my Nikon D200 with a 17-55mm zoom lens. The ISO setting was 125, the shutter speed at 1/125th and the f-stop at *f*/9.