

Tewit Tarn

I had to leave this month's 'assignment' until the very last minute – quite literally - of my extended deadline (thank you editor!). My proper deadline expired a week ago when I was in the Alps. It occurred to me that I *could* have cheated, and got away with snowy Switzerland passing for snowy Cumbria, but fobbing the north face of the Eiger off as a Lake District mountain might have been a step too far. So, after a bit of rapid unpacking of my suitcase, followed by packing my rucksack with camera and the all-essential flask and sandwiches I set off on my latest challenge, to see what I could come up with on this photographic foray. Talking of sandwiches, I keep a stock of ready-made marmalade ones in the freezer. It speeds up crack of dawn getaways. Not, I have to admit, that they happen as often as they should!

My choice this time was Tewit Tarn, set above St John's in the Vale. This is somewhere that I've not had a great deal of success with in the past. Indeed I find most of the upland tarns far from easy. Unlike their valley bottom sisters, they tend to have rough, reedy edges and lack those helpful focal points, such as trees and jetties. Plus mountain profiles do tend to look better from lower down. There are exceptions of course, Blea Tarn with its perfectly framed view of the Langdale Pikes being one, and Lanty's Tarn (although strictly speaking a reservoir), another. But I was drawn to have another go at Tewit Tarn. It's not particularly photogenic but it does offer the only chance of photographing the reflection of the shapely front of Blencathra, which was looking particularly good as I set out. Also there was the chance of some interesting ice.

However, the best made plans, as any keen photographer knows to their cost, have a nasty habit of being foiled by the weather. When I arrived, the tarn was pretty much frozen over, with just one little area of clear water. It was just possible to see Skiddaw reflected, but this was by far the less interesting of the two mountain views. "Not to worry", I thought, "This'll still make a good photo in evening light". So I killed some time pottering around looking at various viewpoints on Great Rigg and revisiting the lovely old stone church of St Johns in the Vale. All the while the light improved, and when I thought the timing was perfect, I walked back to the tarn, to find – blow me down – that it was now *completely* covered with ice. I can accept ice melting during the day – but building up? In fact though, I think a very gentle breeze had nudged a thin layer of ice into the gap. The photo I was after was simply less interesting with ice taking the place of the mirror mountain reflection. I was a bit miffed – and with hindsight would have gone elsewhere earlier on. However, a moment of saving grace came with spotting a nicely curving wall above the tarn, richly lit by the very last of the evening sun, and with a view to the snowy summits of the Helvellyn range in the far distance.



The saving grace at the very end of the day. Walls can be very helpful, adding 'lead in' quality which gives the photo an extra dimension. Avoid walls that go straight across in front of you, chopping the photo into sections that aren't connected – unless you want to do this for some purpose, say to give the photo a deliberate feeling of dislocation. The photo was taken with my Nikon D200, using a tripod, with the aperture priority setting at 100 ISO (to

give maximum definition). I used auto focus (using the centre focus area) on the far distance, with the smallest *f*-stop (*f*22) to maximise the depth of field – so that the distant mountains and the foreground were all in focus. The cable release and mirror lock maximised sharpness.



Tewit Tarn with Skiddaw reflected. This was the photo I'd planned to re-take in rich evening light, to then be foiled when the tarn completely froze over. Details are the same as for the main photo.

These broken reeds trapped under ice caught my attention. Because the ground was soggy, I didn't bother with a tripod, but went for a wide aperture (*f* 5). This enabled me to hand hold at 1/50th sec, while still keeping the ISO at 100.

