

# Shutter



## THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF ADVENTURER HUGH FRANCIS ANDERSON

Interview: Jack Clayton

"In the age of the hipsters, I know it can come across as kind of a wanky thing but I really like just shooting on film. I think the reason that's nice is you get what you shoot. You can't really edit it a lot. It's raw."

Hugh Francis Anderson, who documents his journeys and stories with the help of his trusty Pentax LX camera, is telling me why he favours film over digital. It's a case he makes well.

"I was talking to Børge Ousland, the polar explorer, about photography and he was saying that all the best photos he's taken in the polar region are on film cameras. They're more robust."

Professionally speaking, Hugh wears many different hats. Writer, adventurer, photojournalist, and someone who rocks a roll-neck wool jumper better than anyone since Shackleton, he treads the kind of aspirational career path that must make answering the

classic small talk pub question 'So, what do you do for a living?' something of a rollercoaster. Has he been to outer space? No, but you'd believe him if he said he had.

"I'm really drawn to the style of older photographers like Henri Cartier-Bresson, Don McCullin, and Margaret Bourke-White," Hugh tells me, when I ask about his influences. "Aesthetically, it's what I'm into... There's one image I saw from Peter Beard. He took a photo of Francis Bacon on top of his studio, somewhere on the River Thames. His face is all blurred. You'd look at it today and think maybe that's an off image, but there's just something about it that I really like."

This appreciation for the historic doesn't just reveal itself in Hugh's photography, but in his choice of expeditions as well. In August 2021, Hugh set off on a 1,200 nautical-mile scientific expedition to the small Arctic island of Jan Mayen. Created and co-led in collabo-

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ration with Captain Andreas B. Heide, it was a voyage that came exactly 100 years after a British party led by Shackleton's former geologist Sir James Mann Wordie visited the island to carry out its first geological study.

Just like Wordie and his team, Hugh documented marine life, summited Mount Beerenberg (the world's northernmost active volcano), and collected world-first data on the trip. Underlining the extent to which this was an adventure with a tangible purpose, the findings from the expedition's glaciological research will deepen our understanding of climate change.

"I liked shooting on film for the Jan Mayen expedition because we were recreating something from 100 years ago. It felt like I was taking photos in the same spirit."

Throughout my conversation with Hugh, he's keen to downplay his camera work. "I never really promoted it before because then it becomes a thing," he tells me

early on, before later admitting that being the son of two designers has probably helped him to develop an understanding of good visuals through "osmosis."

Before our chat comes to an end, I ask Hugh what words he lives by when he's out there; scratching his deep itch for adventure. His answer comes across like a gloriously gritty, and pretty explicit, remake of It's A Wonderful Life's 'No man is a failure who has friends' finale.

"I was a student working in a bar and got chatting to this really interesting old guy in there about philosophy. He said to me 'When you die, nobody's going to remember the number on your bank account. They're going to remember if you were a \*\*\*\* or not.'"

See the world, shoot on film and be sound to others. As manifestos go, it's a good one.



**August 2019 - New Brunswick, Canada**

In August 2019, I embarked on a 3,000-mile road trip across Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick with the photographer Alexander Fleming. Early one morning, towards the end of the journey, I took this photo beside

a lake as we drove across New Brunswick towards Fundy National Park. There was both an eeriness and a beauty to the way the mist rose off the water's surface. The sky was obscured by dense clouds and the forest appeared to float on the horizon.

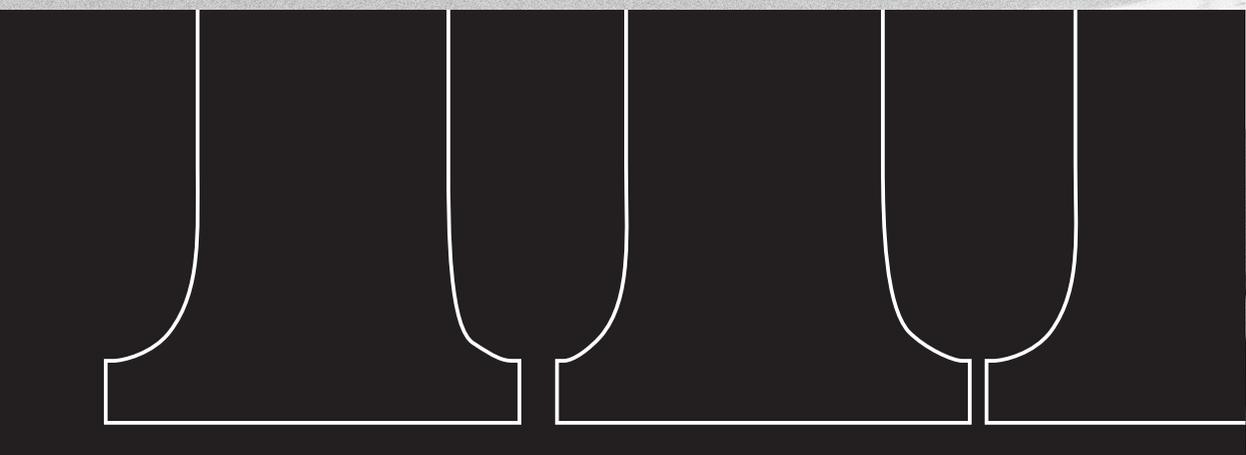


**October 2019 - Bukavu, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**

I took this image in the city of Bukavu on an assignment for National Geographic UK. I was reporting on City of Joy, a rehabilitation centre for the victims of sexual violence as a weapon of war. As we departed the centre and drove across the city, in the conflict-stricken state of South Kivu near the Rwandan border, I was advised not to leave the truck so began to photograph from the

backseat. I was drawn to the bustle of the market: the young boy's gaze, the motion in the sale of goods and the purpose in the elderly lady's outstretched arms.

The image speaks to the sheer abundance of life witnessed during my time spent in the DRC, and it was later selected for the Royal Academy of Arts' 2020 Summer Exhibition.



**October 2019 - Paddy Graham / Stelvio Glacier, Italy**

I was writing the cover story for the winter issue of The Red Bulletin when I captured this shot of freeride skier and Legs of Steel co-founder Paddy Graham. As Paddy hit kicker after kicker, I fired off a roll of film hoping to

capture something from his mid-air artistry. What I like about this is the fact it's not entirely in focus, and that the grain of the film makes the image so different from contemporary ski photography. Paddy and I would later drive across the Tyrol to Innsbruck.



**November 2019 - Captain Andreas / Bergsfjord, Arctic Norway**

I joined Captain Andreas B. Heide onboard his research vessel Barba to track and freedive with Orcas for a feature in Sidetracked. In the small town

of Bergsfjord where we were waiting out foul weather by playing cards, dice games and drinking, Andreas sat at the captain's desk checking forecasts. Something about the light, his expression, posture, and the setting caught my eye. Before the moment had gone, I took this photo.



#### July 2020 - Lysefjord, Norway

During the first lockdown, Andreas and I hatched a plan. I would get myself up to Shetland and he would sail from his hometown of Stavanger, Norway, across the North Sea to pick me up before heading back to the Norwegian fjords. I later wrote about the journey for Lonely Planet.

Towards the end of the journey, we sailed into Lysefjord to climb Kjerag Mountain. I took this from Eagle Head near the summit, looking northeast across Rogaland. I'm inspired by the photography of Ansel Adams, who shot the American West in the early 20th century, and Sebastião Salgado.



#### July 2021 - Tom Hughes / Isles of Scilly, UK

Looking for a sailboat on which to train in the build-up to the Jan Mayen Expedition, the photographer Sophie Bolesworth told me about an old boat named Willowtarn that was looking for a crew to help sail her to Portugal. With Covid spiking, and the rules dictat-

ing entry to Portugal altering, our plans changed. The captain decided to sail to the Isles of Scilly, where we later picked up sailor Tom Hughes. Tom is an eccentric who lives his life as a nomad. He doesn't wear shoes and is never without his sailor cap and cigarette. This image defines the man I met.





Norway at the time, and until we were in Svalbard, the whole expedition was on the line. Seeing the snow-dusted volcanic landscape out the window reinvigorated my sense of adventure. Knowing the expedition was going to take place, I let out a sigh of relief.

2021 - Jan Mayen Expedition / Svalbard

After 18 months of expedition planning, which was often touch and go due to the pandemic, this was the first photo I took as filmmaker Hugo Pettit and I flew into Svalbard to meet Andreas. We needed letters from the British ambassador in Norway to gain entrance to



2021 - Jan Mayen Expedition / Longyearbyen

Longyearbyen is a remarkable town. The world's northernmost outpost, it's like a flashback to another era. The remnants of its mining history are every-

where to be seen. In summer, without a thick blanket of snow, there's almost something macabre about it. I became almost obsessed with this strange outpost and its surrounding landscape.



**2021 - Jan Mayen Expedition / Jan Mayen**

From Svalbard, we spent six days sailing across the Norwegian and Greenland Seas to Jan Mayen. Conditions were rough and the volatility of the island was immediately apparent. I took this as we sailed towards the south of the island to begin our summit attempt. The night before, winds of more than 57-knots (offi-

cially 'violent storm force') battered the boat whilst at anchor and tore the flag to shreds. There's such hostility in this image and you can tell, in an instant, that this is a remote location. What struck me though was that life still abounds in this environment: see the Northern Fulmar flying overhead, unperturbed by the cold and wind.



**2021 - Jan Mayen Expedition / Mount Beerenberg**

The purpose of the expedition was to summit the world's northernmost volcano on the centenary of its first ascent. Whilst the degradation of the glacier was such that we couldn't follow the original route, we were able to summit in a blizzard so encompassing that we could barely see. In total, the 70 km approach and climb took 37 hours.

After not much sleep, we had to set sail due to an incoming weather front. I took this image of Beerenberg as we left. To know we had stood on the summit just 24 hours before, and to be offered such a clear view, remains one of my fondest memories. It felt like the mountain was mocking and congratulating us at the same time.