

Living the high life



Dave Butcher worked for Ilford Photo Ltd for more than 20 years before starting his own photography business. He talks to **David Clark** about his career and one of his favourite locations, the Scottish Highlands

WHEN you look at Dave Butcher's prints, you can see the effort he has made to produce top-quality photographs. Made using traditional film and darkroom techniques, they are the work of a meticulous printer. His inspiration came from seeing professional printers at work. During his time as manager of Ilford Photo Ltd's photographic printing department, Dave was able to observe the company's printers first-hand and the experience left a powerful impression on him.

'Working with printers at Ilford was fantastic,' says Dave. 'To see what they were given to begin with and what they turned out as a final print was amazing. It gave me an insight as to what could be achieved and transformed my printing.'

Derbyshire-based Dave, 52, retired early from Ilford two years ago after many years in the business, and has begun building a new career as a landscape photographer specialising in black & white work. He sells fine-art prints of his work, does lectures at camera clubs and now has a book published. *High Light: The Landscape Photography of Dave Butcher* displays a range of his work shot in many countries. Meanwhile, the text gives useful tips on hill and mountain photography, and reveals details of his darkroom techniques.

Although Dave's photography is prospering now, it

'I was always interested in landscapes, looking at form and shape and texture'

hasn't all been plain sailing. In fact, being involved in photography at all was something of an accident. When he left school, Dave planned to go into the family bicycle business based in Welwyn, Hertfordshire. However, soon after starting work there he discovered he had a strong allergic reaction to oil and grease, which covered his hands with eczema and put paid to his bicycle-related ambitions.

He had been the family photographer from an early age – his grandmother gave him a Kodak Box Brownie at the age of five – and a career as a photographer appealed to him. Unfortunately, a trip to the local careers centre resulted in Dave being told to forget ideas of such glamorous jobs, and a local photographer he met told him to look for a steady job because photography was too insecure. As a result, Dave found a job as a lab technician and became a chemist by profession.

He went on to run the darkroom and photographic service at Unilever before moving on to Ilford, where he stayed for 21 years. He did a variety of jobs, including photographic research scientist and project management, before managing the Ilford Printing Department, and although his career was cut short by a back injury, it has given him the opportunity to establish himself in



Glen Lorne in the northwest Highlands of Scotland. Manzo 65, 50mm, f/11, 1/125s

Lota Corrie with the Isle of Skye beyond. Manzo 65, 50mm, f/11, 1/125s, 6 stops extra exposure



the career he had hoped to pursue when he left school. Dave maintained his interest in photography while working in the industry and had been selling prints from the late 1980s. 'I was always interested in landscapes and city shots, graphic shots, looking at form, shape and texture,' he says. 'I quickly realised that I wasn't good at photographing people.'

His first SLR was a Praktica Super TL, bought in 1969, and he shot his first black & white film the following year, developing it in chemicals he had mixed himself. He moved on to medium-format work in 1986 with a Mamiya 645 Super. 'The Mamiya was great to start with and reasonably priced. Unfortunately it was quite heavy and quite cumbersome to use when walking the hills,' he says.

'I have used a Mamiya 6 MF since 1993. I have three bodies and three lenses - a 50mm wideangle, a 75mm standard and a 150mm short telephoto. I mainly use the 50mm and 150mm lenses. I seldom use the standard, mainly because I can't carry much gear when I'm out on the hills due to my back injury.'

Dave originally shot in both b&w and colour, but quickly decided to specialise in monochrome. 'I would have the odd disaster when I'd forget to take the orange filter off the lens and get a lot of orange-coloured prints,' he remembers. 'I got some good colour pictures, but I could see that my black & white work was much better so I stopped shooting colour.'

'Straight away, I could see that my black & white work improved as a result of concentrating solely upon it and making my mind work in one particular way. Now I see pictures all the time, and if the conditions aren't right, I log them for when the weather's fine.'

He cites Ansel Adams as a big influence on his

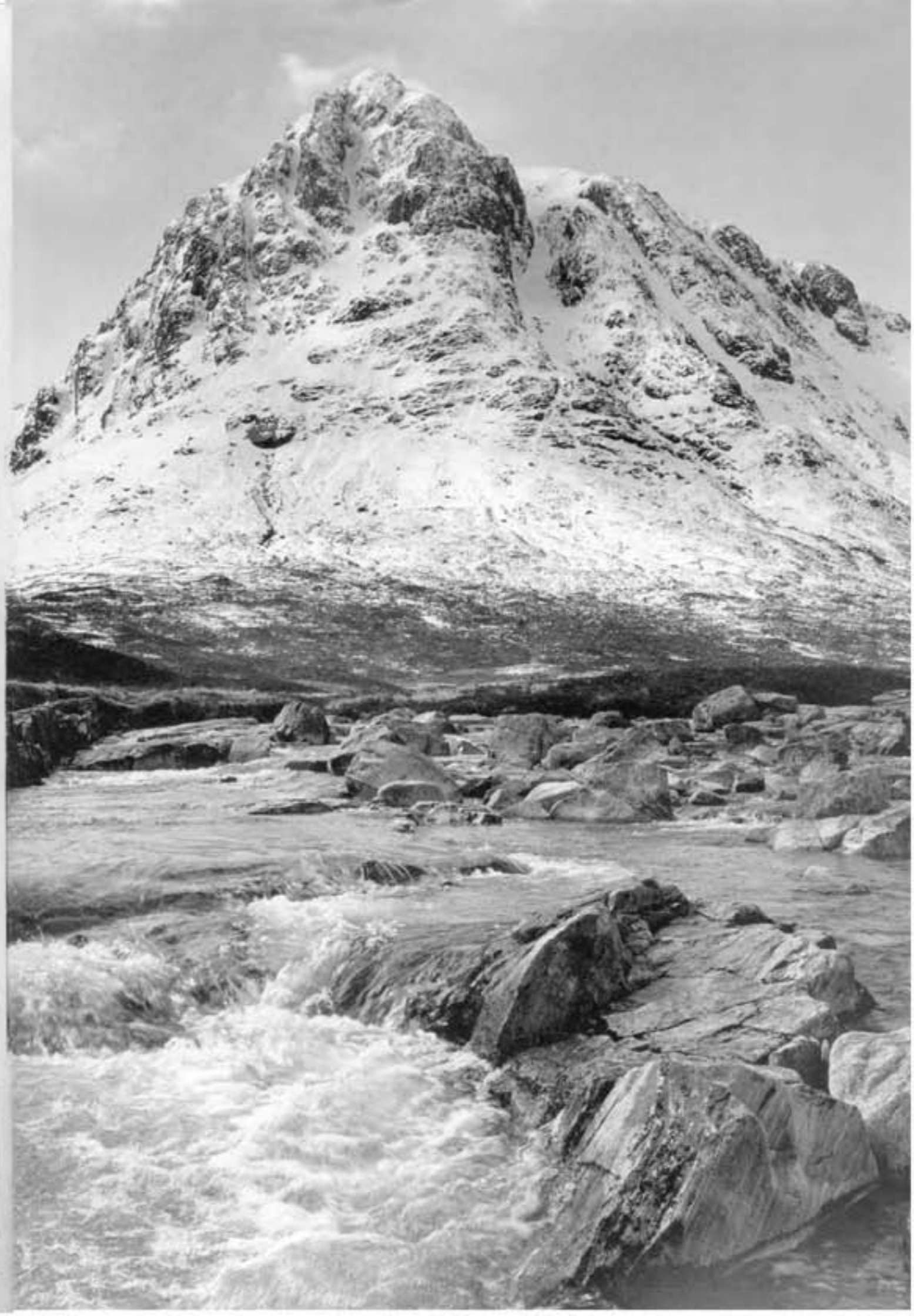
'I could see that my b&w work improved as a result of concentrating solely upon it and making my mind work in one particular way'



ABOVE Sgurr na Sgine and Loch Hourn
Mamiya 645 Super
45mm, Ilford FP4

RIGHT Lochan Urr reflections, Glen Etive
Mamiya 6, 50mm,
Ilford FP4 Plus

OPPOSITE PAGE
Buachaille Etive Mor, Rannoch Moor, Scotland
Mamiya 6, 50mm,
Ilford Delta Pro100





'There's coastal scenery, old ruined castles, the big mountains, lochans for reflection shots, trees and open hillsides'

work, but doesn't use Adams' famous Zone System for determining exposures. 'I do not use the Zone System because we have variable-contrast paper nowadays and I really do not see a need for it,' he says. 'I mostly use the camera's meter and it is pretty accurate when using the wideangle as it is effectively centreweighted. When I can, I use a Sekonic L-508 Zoom Master lightmeter, which is particularly useful with the 150mm lens. At that focal length, the camera's metering area is almost full frame so it is practically useless unless it is a dull day and the light is fairly uniform.'

'The spotmetering mode is the most useful, and I take my reading from midtones. If I'm desperate and up in the mountains, I take a reading from the back of my blue ski glove, which gives me roughly the right sort of exposure.'

Dave shoots on Ilford FP4 Plus 120 film, unless he's shooting infrared-style work, when he uses Ilford SFX 120 film. 'It's rated as ISO 200, but the filter requires an extra four stops and uncertainty in IR levels need a further two stops of bracketing to make sure of a shot,' he says. The prints he uses are his own work and his main paper is Ilford Multigrade IV FB.

As a keen walker and mountaineer, Dave has photographed in a variety of mountainous locations including those in USA, France, Italy, Switzerland and Austria. However, he most often shoots in England, Wales and particularly Scotland. 'When you get a good day in Scotland, nothing beats it as a location. It's fantastic,' he says. 'I've had some of my best mountain days in the



Descent from Bruach na Frithe, Isle of Skye
Mamiya 6, 50mm, Ilford FP4 Plus

Frosted grasses, Black Mount, Scottish Highlands
Mamiya 6, 50mm, Ilford FP4 Plus

Scottish Highlands and I love it. I go there every year.

'My wife and I have walked all of the 284 mountains over 3,000 feet, the Munros, in just under 12 years. We did a fifth of them in the winter months. Doing a project like that is great because it gets you into places that you wouldn't think of going.'

A particular favourite of Dave's is Glencoe for its variety of scenery to photograph. 'It's a mecca for photography,' he continues. 'There's coastal scenery, old ruined castles, the big mountains, lochans for reflection shots, trees and open hillsides that are like Alpine scenery. It offers so many different variations for your pictures.'

Dave launched his website in December 2003 and that venture, together with his book, has made a big difference to his photography business. He is expanding his programme of lectures, in which he shows straight prints of his photographs in contrast to the final prints, which are often very different. 'It doesn't matter if you're a digital or a darkroom worker, the lectures give people an idea of what can be achieved with an image,' he says.

Not surprisingly, he has no plans to use digital imaging. 'I did buy a digital camera recently, but only to shoot my large prints and put them on my website,' he explains. 'If my Mamiya 6 breaks down, I plan to buy a Mamiya 7.'

• Dave's photographs will be on show from 21-28 May at the Paxton Suite, Pavilion Gardens, Buxton, Derbyshire (tel: 01298 23114) as part of an exhibition by the High Peak Artists and Craft Workers Association. To see more of Dave's work, visit his website www.davebutcher.net.



Black Mount and Clach Leathad reflection, Rannoch Moor
Mamiya 6, 50mm, Ilford FP4 Plus

Coire Lagan from Sgurr Alasdair on the Isle of Skye
Mamiya 6, 50mm, Ilford FP4 Plus

High Light

High Light: The Landscape Photography of Dave Butcher, is published by Arem Publishing Ltd. Normally priced £12.99, it is available to AP readers direct from Dave Butcher for £10 plus £1.50 postage and packing. Email him at mono@davebutcher.net, quoting *Amateur Photographer*, or write to Dave Butcher, Briarwood, Tunstead Milton, Whaley Bridge, High Peak, Derbyshire SK23 7ER.

