



Dave Butcher images, from the top, Black Clough Falls; Curbar millstone; Parkhouse Hill.

Magic of mono brings majestic beauty of Peaks into true clarity

Derbyshire-based photographer Dave Butcher has fans around the world thanks to his atmospheric black and white images, many of which focus on the Peak District. An exhibition of his work is currently on display at Buxton. Jill Gallon reports.

Dave Butcher hasn't had a colour film in his camera for eight years. He works in black and white only and the results are breathtakingly spectacular.

His shots of the Peak District are achingly atmospheric and, without the power of colour to distract you, the eye automatically contemplates other aspects of the image.

"With black and white photography you focus on shapes, patterns, textures and tones," said Dave, who discovered a natural affinity for the camera lens when he was knee-high to a grasshopper.

"My grandmother gave me my first camera, a Box Brownie, when I was four or five in the mid-50s," said Dave. "My father bought a reasonable camera a bit later on but he was hopeless at taking pictures. From around the age of seven I started taking all the family photos."

His love affair with photography continued – and he was drawn to mono images. Future jobs allowed him to master the skill of developing black and white pictures to the highest quality.

"In the 70s I got a job as a lab technician. There was a darkroom and I learned the basics of making prints. Later on, I set up and ran a photographic service at Unilever"

After eight years of part-time study for a chemistry degree, mainly while working for Unilever Research, followed by three years' full-time study in Cambridge for a PhD, he took a job with Ilford. This 125-year-old company specialises in producing black and white photographic materials, especially traditional films and papers, to the highest standards.

Dave was in his element: "At Ilford I saw lots and lots of pictures every day and quickly learned what a good black and white picture was. Later, I took over the photographic printing department at Ilford. They were regarded as the best printers in the country."

At the same time, Dave's camera was never far from his side. "I have always taken photos wherever I am. As well as landscape, I like architecture and ski shots.

All was well behind the lens but ill health forced a change of direction at work. "I had a bad back and was in agony sitting at a computer all day. By lunchtime I sometimes had to lie on the floor for pain relief. I think having to step over me gave my colleagues a clue that all was not well."

Dave, who lives near Whaley Bridge, laughs at the memory. He left Ilford after 21 years in 2002 with a dream of making a living doing what he liked best – taking magnificent mono photos. "I had no idea if it was going to work and no great plan," said Dave. "I just hoped for the best."

Later on, he approached a publisher with the idea of producing a book featuring his work together with advice about landscape photography. *High Light* hit the shops in 2005 and sold out. It was reprinted last year. Also in 2007 his second book, *Peak Light*, was released. It features 90 images, which take you on a pictorial tour of the Peak District, one of the most stunning national parks in the world. "It gives a location map so people can



follow in my footsteps and find my tripod holes," said Dave. He is delighted at how well his business is going. As well as selling his prints, he runs master classes in darkroom printing and photography. He has shown his work at retail shows in the UK and, last year, ventured to New York for a trade show. "I had no idea whether it would be worth it but we were approached by International Graphics, a fine art firm publisher based in Germany. They have included 13 of my images in their catalogue, which has recently been distributed worldwide. Bearing in mind that breakthrough, Dave and wife Jan, who work together in the business, are hugely excited about what 2008 will bring. However, though the catalogue will reach a wide audience, there is one thing Dave will never compromise on. "I won't have anything mass produced. I hand-print everything I sell."

● The Peak Light exhibition, sponsored by Harman Technology, runs until March 23 at Buxton Museum and Art Gallery, Terrace Road, Buxton. Dave will be doing book signings on February 16 and March 22. To see more of his images, visit www.davebutcher.net.



Above: Dave in his natural habitat – the Peak District, with trusty camera at his side. Left: Dave Butcher with some of his precious negatives. He hand-prints all of his pictures.



As well as landscape photography, Dave Butcher specialises in snow-inspired and city images. Left: A Snowboarder in Lech, Austria. Above: Gondolas on the Grand Canal in Venice.

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