Get in the zone for landscapes

Andrew Haggar has devised an innovative long-form project: take one square kilometre and photograph it for a number of years. Niall Hampton finds out more

Andrew Haggar
Landscape photographer

A qualified landscape architect, Haggar is also a photographer and designer. Although he has travelled extensively for work and pleasure, Haggar is a proud native and resident of rural Cumbria.
https://mysqk.com/



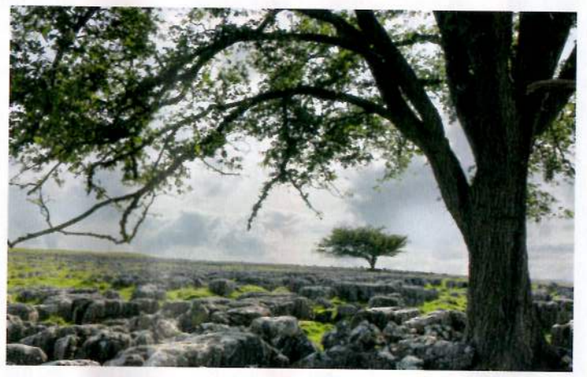
We're all familiar with the term 'in the zone' and being absorbed with the job in hand, but Andrew Haggar has literally taken this concept to the next level. Having chosen a square kilometre of open land close to his home, Haggar has repeatedly photographed it over the past six years for a long-term photo project titled MySquareK, or MySqK for short.

Looking to publish it as a book, Haggar invited *Digital Camera* up to Cumbria so we could see how the project works in practice.

One of England's most sparsely populated counties, Cumbria boasts many areas of outstanding natural beauty and Haggar's chosen area nestles within the Pennine, Howgill and Lake District hills.

Arriving in the village of Crosby Ravensworth at dinner time, I meet Haggar early the next day, and prepare to find out more about MySqK. As we drive up a track to the location, it's soon clear that Haggar's square kilometre is no honeypot and he doesn't shoot picture postcard photos; this is rugged and exposed terrain, grazed by sheep in weather conditions that are often very unforgiving.

But, as Haggar notes, great landscape photographs can be taken in the most →



Landscape photographers are often attracted to the single tree for subject matter, but Haggar has chosen a square kilometre with two.



Keep it old school: use paper maps

"Maps enable you to look for landscape features that might represent good photographic opportunities, for example, rivers, lakes, woodland and so on. Ordnance Survey maps are divided up into 1km squares with the vertical grid lines running south to north (bottom to top) and the horizontal grid lines running west to east (left to right). Contours define the height and changes in the level of terrain. The closer they are together, the steeper the slope. You can read the form of the landscape by reading the contours on a map. When out in the open landscape, if you need to locate your whereabouts on a map, walls and fences (and their corners and junctions), depicted by a thin black line, are usually good reference points."





Top: Haggar photographing the two trees, the anchor point of MySqK's grid square. Above: the four corners of Haggar's project area, each view looking diagonally into the grid square.



unremarkable and unassuming places. And this rugged Cumbrian landscape is what inspired Haggar to become a photographer, which he practises alongside working as a landscape architect.

Parking his car next to a gate, Haggar and I walk the final half mile as he tells me more about MySqK. It's a straightforward concept; having photographed a pair of trees during a walk, Haggar revisited them with his camera many times. So what drew him to them?

> The idea is to explore your space in depth through repeated visits

"I was initially attracted to the two trees – which was something of an oddity, as landscape photographers are traditionally attracted to the single tree as a subject," Haggar explains. "Then I looked where they were on the Ordnance Survey map and established my square kilometre from there."

Knowing the value of repeatedly working a 'patch' to improve as a landscape photographer, Haggar decided to photograph his square kilometre over a long-term period, which has amounted to six years so far.

The two trees are an elm and a hawthorn and sit on a rise that's 330 metres above sea level, surrounded by an outcrop limestone pavement. Since leaving the car, the weather has deteriorated and rain is now scudding down, bouncing up sharply from the limestone rock. Unfazed, Haggar unpacks his camera and composes a study of the trees with the rocks in the foreground. →

07.55am

Camera	Sony A7R IV
Lens	Sony FE 16-35mm F2.8 GM
Exposure	1/40 sec at f/11, ISO 100





Camera	Panasonic Lumix LX3
Lens	Leica 24mm, 2.5x zoom
Exposure	1/125 sec at f/2, ISO 80



Camera	Panasonic Lumix LX3
Lens	Leica 24mm, 2.5x zoom
Exposure	1/30 sec at f/8, ISO 160



Making a long-form project into a book

Haggar is looking to publish this long-form project as a book (see p15) and sequencing the photos for a book is just as involved as creating the images. Here, Haggar talks us through his process.

"Make some inexpensive 6x4cm prints of all the photographs you are considering for your book project and spread them out on the floor or a large table. Look for relationships between photographs, whether it's similar colours or tones, times of the year, subjects or shapes in the pictures and so on, then try to identify a thread or threads. I wanted the viewer to be quietly taken through the seasons with my images. That was one continuous thread," Haggar says.

"I also wanted photographs that were going to be adjacent to each other to have more than just the time of year in common, so I thought carefully about how the photos complemented each other. That set up other threads. You want to start and end strongly. Leave your viewer or reader wanting more."





A stream runs through the south-east corner of Haggar's grid square, and he has photographed it many times over six years. Here, he adds a 10-stop ND filter to shoot a 30-second long exposure.

Once satisfied with this shot, Haggar introduces another vital piece of his kit – a Panasonic Lumix LX3 compact, which he uses for in-camera double exposures. Having asked Haggar if we can visit the four corners of the grid square, so I can get an idea of the breadth of landscapes it contains, we carry on walking. So what are the rules of MySqK, I ask.

"To take good and worthy photographs, and not just 'record' shots, from within the boundaries of the kilometre grid square on the map that you have chosen as your local patch," Haggar replies. "The idea is that through repeated visits you will learn to explore your space in greater depth and that will in turn help you to discover more and different photographic opportunities.

And this landscape is certainly rugged. "My square kilometre is open fell," Haggar confirms. "Fell is a northern word that means a high-altitude landscape feature, usually a barren mass of land in the form of a mountain. This is higher ground – not a mountain – open grassland with few trees, and it can be quite wild. I like that wild element.

"Most of the time I don't see anybody when I'm up here and I think this gives me a sense of detachment which in turn helps me collect my thoughts and enables me to tune into the landscape more." →

Camera	Sony A7R IV
Lens	Sony FE 16-35mm F2.8 GM
Exposure	30 sec at f/16, ISO 100 (with 10-stop ND)





Haggar's kit for super scenics

Take a peek inside our pro's F-Stop Ajna backpack

1 Sony A7R IV
"It handles really well and I enjoy using it. I think the colours are extremely representative of what I see in reality."

2 Sony FE 16-35mm F2.8 GM
"I love taking landscape photos with strong foreground elements, so this range of focal lengths is a must for me."

3 Panasonic Lumix LX3
"I've had this camera for many years and still find the image quality to be excellent. I love its multi-exposure mode."

4 Sony FE 70-200mm F4 G OSS
"This doesn't get used as much as the other two lenses, but it's not too heavy for a zoom of this type and quality."

5 Sony FE 24-105mm F4 G OSS
"A versatile optic. Unless I need to use a different lens, this is the glass that's on my camera most of the time."

6 Lee Filters
Lee 100 ND Grad filters
"I'm 'old school' and use ND grad filters for balancing the exposure of bright skies with darker foregrounds, in-camera."

7 Lee Filters
Lee 100 ND filters
"I use 6-stop and 10-stop neutral density filters to photograph water and capture grasses in the blowing wind."

8 Gitzo GT2540 carbon fibre tripod
"I've owned this for a long time – it's rugged and very well made, and some of its parts can be replaced by the user."









Clockwise from above: Haggar completing a double exposure inside a juniper tree. His Lumix LX3 is an oldie, but a goodie. Haggar logs details of any scenes which resonate with him. Checking a capture on the A7R IV.

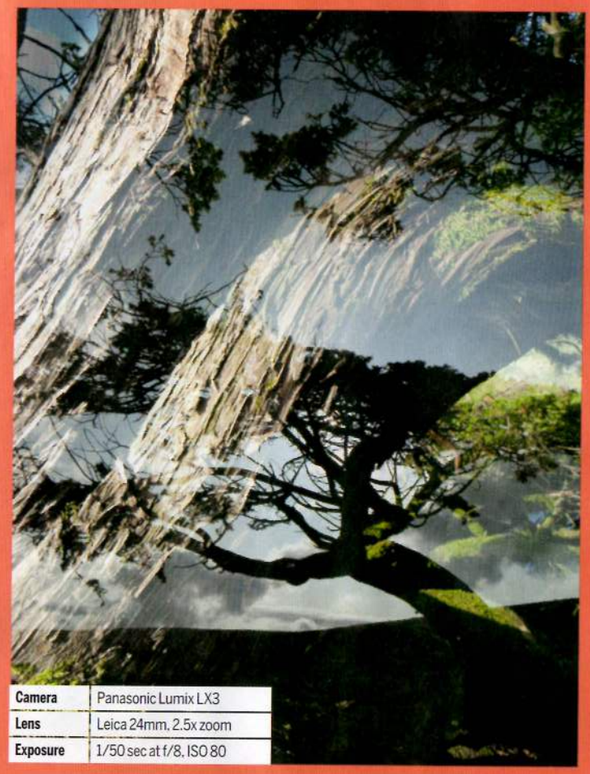
Carrying on and having crested a rise, we descend into a valley where the grassland vies for space with purple heather. Pausing to photograph a large round stone, we make for the next suggested location – a stream that meanders past a juniper tree. As he attaches an ND filter to his lens for a long-exposure shot, Haggar says that he returns to this particularly pleasing spot on a regular basis. Having mentioned earlier that MySqK is a sustainable project and is also good for mindfulness, I ask Haggar to explain more.

"It's sustainable because one of its founding principles is to shoot local," he says. "By default, this reduces vehicular travel or even cuts it out altogether if your chosen square is within walking or cycling distance. This has obvious money-saving implications, too. The idea is that you choose somewhere easy to get to, a place you are familiar with, that you like going to and, most importantly, are inspired to go there," he adds.

"From a mindfulness point of view, MySqK is about focusing awareness on the present moment and seeing where inspiration takes you. Only on a few occasions did I visit my square kilometre with a pre-conceived idea of what I was going to take photographs of."

Haggar completes his double exposure at the juniper tree and we call it a day. Having thoroughly enjoyed my walk in the wilderness, I can really see the benefits of MySqK – you could safely say that I'm in the zone. ●

> MySqK is sustainable because its founding principle is to shoot local and reduce vehicular travel – or even cut it out altogether"



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Lens	Leica 24mm, 2.5x zoom
Exposure	1/50 sec at f/8, ISO 80



Camera	Panasonic Lumix LX3
Lens	Leica 24mm, 2.5x zoom
Exposure	1/100 sec at f/8, ISO 160

Start your own MySqK project

Fancy embarking on your own long-term MySqK? Follow these six tips from Haggar and you won't go wrong...

1 "Choose somewhere nearby, somewhere you like going, somewhere that is likely to inspire you and that you have a connection with."

2 "Repeated visits are key. They will increase familiarity and therefore your connection with your space, which will fuel creativity."



The *MySqK* book is coming soon: https://mysqk.com/

3 "Always know why you are taking a photograph. What attracted you? What did you see and experience? Is there a story you can show?"

4 "Don't settle for shooting at eye level. Walk all the way around your subject and get down low to open up new perspectives."

5 "Shoot at any time and in all conditions, too. I find that being on the edge of the weather, if I can manage it, is usually a good place to be."

6 "Photographing your square kilometre is about the sum of the parts. I'm not looking for picture postcard views, just good photos that will contribute to the story I am telling."



How Haggar edits his photos

For Haggar, photography is something you do with a camera, not a computer, so he likes to get as much right in-camera as he can. He uses Adobe Lightroom to carry out basic editing on his files. "Typical edits would be cropping to a different aspect ratio, taking care of any highlights where necessary and possibly bringing out shadows, and converting to monochrome," he says. "I don't do much editing to my double exposures – if anything, it's just minor adjustments to shadows and highlights. Sometimes, I will enhance the detail using the Texture adjustment (pictured, above), if there's stone or bark in the image, for example. That said, I think you can do anything you want with double exposures – I see them as something very creative, an artistic collage."