Society news

This is the first mini newsletter of the New Year, and although things are still very challenging, there is encouraging progress with vaccination roll out, so hopefully everybody is keeping safe and well until restrictions begin to ease over the coming weeks and months. In the meantime there is lots to look forward to in the rest of this year's modified programme (see Page 7). Don't forget that we are planning to run the annual print competition in some form so make sure to sort out some great images for us all to enjoy. If all goes well we are still planning to hold a few meetings in our new hall Methodist Hall venue towards the end of the season so let's hope that restrictions will be eased by then.

We are now beginning to plan ahead for the summer and next season. We held a useful informal Zoom discussion with members on 12 January to get some ideas for this, and we will keep you briefed on progress. One of the items suggested was some form of summer social event and more on this is set out below. Please feed back Jim Hiscox on the questions raised so we can see if there is sufficient interest to take this forward.

As you know we have been very keen to recruit some new members onto the committee to make sure we have enough people to run the Society in the way we all want. I am very pleased to say that three people, John Shaw, Karen Hughes and Keith Tyler have volunteered and have been co-opted onto the committee to start helping out. We are most grateful for their support, but we are still keen for more help, so let me know if you think you can contribute to the Society. As mentioned at the recent member discussion meeting, we are looking at ways we can make the committee more flexible in the future to make it easier to help and more information on this will be sent out in due course.

Most of the rest of this newsletter is due to a number of interesting articles on clever use of smart phones by Jim Hiscox for which our thanks. If you wish to contribute any articles to future newsletters please let me know. They will be most welcome.

Bob Breach   breaches@btinternet.com

Possible summer social photo trip

We all hope that the current restrictions will have been eased by summer and with that in mind we are considering ways to celebrate being able to get out and about again. One thought is to have a social day out involving a coach trip to, say, a town in the Cotswolds with time for lunch, some photography and so on. Partners would be welcome to join in, we may be able to make a contribution to the costs for Society Funds as it would be a special event to promote the society, encourage members to get involved again, and hopefully enjoy some good weather! We need to assess whether this is something that would appeal to you so please let Jim Hiscox know:

1. If you would be interested
2. If so how many tickets you would want
3. Preferred day of the week - we are thinking Saturday might be best but if there is a preference for another day that should be possible
4. Weeks in July and August that you would be available

This trip would leave Solihull at around 09.30 and return by 19.00 using an executive grade coach with on-board toilet etc.

jimhiscox@sagalouts.org.uk
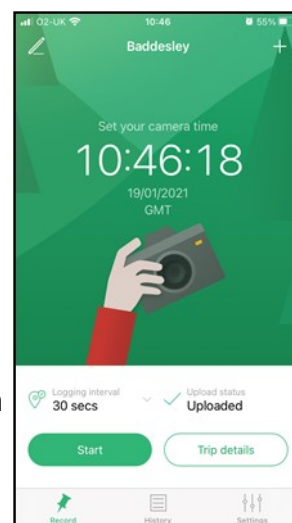
Things to use your smartphone for 1- *Jim Hiscox*

Tagging your photos with GPS data

You're probably aware that photos taken with your iPhone etc. have the GPS co-ordinates recorded in the metadata, and if you upload these to Lightroom you'll have noticed that this information is copied across so that going to the Map module shows where in the world each photo was taken. It's worth noting though that you sometimes have to give the phone a chance to grab it's GPS location for accuracy. Now I don't know about you but I find this ability to capture when *and* where a photo was taken is very interesting and useful, but it only works with my iPhone and not with either of my main cameras. You can buy add-on GPS units but these are expensive, add bulk/weight and drain the camera battery unless self-powered. There ought to be an App I thought. Good news is there are quite a few as it happens. I've tried a couple and this article is about my preferred one, Geotag Photos Pro 2 (this version costs £8 but there is a cut-down free version).

First things first. It runs in the background on your phone so does drain power while running but this is not horrendous and you can start and stop it if you're moving between locations and aren't bothered about recording that part of the journey. I haven't yet tried running it all day but an hour or two didn't seem to use all that much power. If you're worried simply invest in a power bank for the phone, not a bad idea if you're out and about in any case I think.
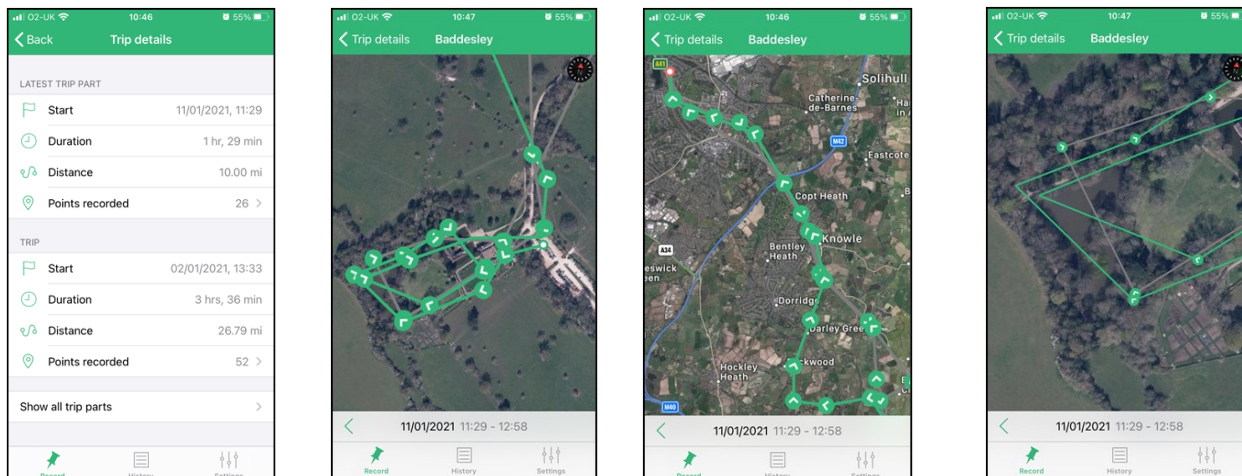
The process is simple.

- The first thing to ensure is that your camera's clock is set to the same time as your phone, if you forget to do this the software can work out the difference afterwards and auto-correct but it's an extra step and checking/resetting the time is easy.
- You need to set a Logging Interval, this can be anything from Continuous to every hour, or Off.
- In the Settings page you set such things as Minimal Position Change (10 yards min), the GPS location method, which units (imperial or Metric), and a few other details. These settings remain in force until you decide to change them.
- You now have a couple of options; you can create a new trip by typing in a suitable name and start recording, or add to an existing trip by going straight to record. Unless you create a new trip it will assume that you are continuing an existing one even if it's several days later.
- Now just start shooting! The App is doing its thing by recording using the settings you have chosen.

The next page shows a few screen grabs from the App. The trip shown has 26 points recorded and included the drive to and from Baddesley Clinton as well as a walk of a couple of laps around the lake there. You are able to zoom in on the trip to get more detail which as you'll see was set to 2 minutes.

Things to use your smartphone for 1 (cont.)

Tagging your photos with GPS data

When you get home you just do the following;

- Export your trips as GPX via Dropbox, web or email
- Open Lightroom.
- Import the GPX files into the Map Module.
- Select your photos and geotag them all with just one click

At this point it's worth remembering that Geotag records according to the settings you choose, so unless you selected 'continuous' it only logs at the time interval selected, and it quite literally 'joins the dots' with straight lines. So if you took a shot between points it will link that time to the track but this could show you being in the middle of a lake, or in mid air etc. Unless you wanted to be really accurate I don't think this is a real issue though.

Here is a screen shot from Lightroom Map showing a number of photos taken on a CSC and logged using Geotag. Note that the actual walk itself is not retained in Map.

I moved the location of a couple of shots after importing the mapping data as it did seem that I was in the lake at the time and I was pretty sure I wasn't!

Things to use your smartphone for 2 - *Jim Hiscox*

Using your phone as a webcam

A lot of us have become used to using services such as Zoom over the past year, even those who had never used video calling/conferencing before. This has been great, enabling friends and relatives to remain in visual contact when all other options were impossible. There does tend to be one glaring problem though, in my view anyway, and that is the quality of the video. There can be a number of reasons for this but a common one is the cameras built into the many laptops and desktops which are frequently very much worse than they should be.
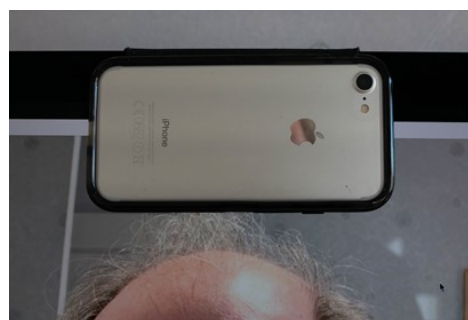
An obvious solution is to buy a separate webcam. Logitech seem to be the front runner in this field but they have been in such demand that many have been sold-out for months. You could try one of the many unheard of brands via Amazon (other retailers are available), or you could download a bit of software to your smart phone and use that instead. Nearly all such phones have had very good cameras for many years, certainly better than you strictly need for the internet.

This is the route I choose, some research pointed to a couple of suitable Apps and I decided on one called EpocCam. There is a free version but this restricts the definition to the sub-HD 720p, watermarks your image, etc. so I upgraded to the paid-for one. This gives you proper HD of 1080p. Setting things up is fairly simple, the phone will connect to your laptop/desktop using either a wired or wireless connection and it decides automatically which to use. Then, if you're using Zoom for example, you need to select EpocCam as the video source and let the two find each other. I found this usually works pretty well, although should the connection be lost (I accidentally shut the app down once) I found that reconnection is not as quick or automatic as I expected.

The next thing to consider is power drain on the phone battery. Because you will be running the camera continuously during a Zoom session it runs the battery down quite rapidly so connecting to a power source is your best bet.

The final point to make is that mounting the phone requires a bit of thought. Unless you want the camera to be some distance from you and don't mind having a side-on visual it can be tricky finding a solution. Goose-neck holders are out there, not especially expensive (and you have saved the cost of webcam) and usually clamp to the desk top so look a decent option. I may go down that route yet, but for now I have found a work-around. My phone lives in a wallet-type case with a hinged cover so I felt that it should be possible to 'hang' the phone in it's case over the top of my iMac. This works but requires me to reverse the phone in the case to get the image the correct way up. A small inconvenience in my view for the benefit to the video quality.

Things to use your smartphone for 3 - *Jim Hiscox*

Using your smartphone as a security camera

I wonder whether you acquired a shiny new smart phone over Christmas? Or even before or after really. The point is do you have a relatively old but still fully functioning smart phone that is gathering dust now? And if so would you like to know about a way of using for something useful perhaps?

This is the situation I had a couple of months or so ago and it occurred to me that most modern phones have really good cameras so might it be possible to repurpose it to work as a security camera. The answer is that yes you can by downloading a suitable App. After doing a spot of research I settled on Alfred Camera, and went for the Premium version for which you pay either a monthly subscription or a one-off annual charge. For this you get HD video and cloud recordings of all events it spots.

The process is simple; download the app on two phones (your old one and the shiny new one), declare one as the camera and the other as the viewer, follow the easy set-up steps and off you go. Once up and running the camera detects any movement in its field of view and records it to the cloud from where you can view it at will. You can set it to sound an alert each time but I found that it was triggering quite a bit so turned that off. You can monitor the video stream live if you want as well. There is a facility to mask off part of the image to reduce unwanted triggers, e.g. from tree branches moving in the wind, which does work.

I don't know what system it uses to detect motion but I have it working through double glazing and it always seems to trigger when I test it whether day or night. On the subject of night vision it is surprisingly good considering iPhone cameras aren't rated particularly highly in that respect.

There are a few things you will need to think about in addition to where to put the camera/phone and they are;
- How to mount it. I tried various home-made ideas before concluding that a ready-made stand from Amazon was the answer. You'll notice the Heath-Robinson base in the photo - I made it for a quick test and it worked so the 'better' one never got made. Ah well.
- How you will power it. The battery drain is very high and it won't run for more than 2 - 3 hours unaided. I therefore bought the longest USB to Lightning I could find (10ft) and placed the camera as close to a mains socket as sensible. I actually changed the socket to one with built-in USB sockets but that's another story.
- What you include in the view. This can be very important as the General Data Protect Regulations (GDPR) as well as the Data Protection Act 2018 may apply, and failing to comply with your obligations could land you with a fine. To avoid all this ensure that the view does not include anything outside your own property e.g. a neighbour's garden/driveway, the pavement and road outside your house, in fact anywhere that you can't call your own. You can include these areas of course but must take appropriate actions if you do; place a sign to alert others that you are recording activity by CCTV, and make a note of the reasons why you think this is necessary. This is so you have an answer should anyone request sight of the footage etc. and as an explanation to the Information Commissioners Office (ICO). All that said your neighbours might be quite happy that you're are helping to protect their property too, but passers-by might not feel the same.

There is a function that aims to reduce power consumption by turning the display off which doesn't matter since you'll be on mains power but it does also reduce the heat generated by having the camera running 24/7. The phone does get warm but not hot, I've not had any problems over a couple of months. Being in free air space probably helps.

Things to use your smartphone for 3 (Cont.)

Nettie Edwards recommended editing apps

Nettie Edwards, the well known smartphone photographer, spoke at our Society last year, and provided this list of recommended photo editing apps for (mainly Apple) smart phones.

ALTERNATIVE NATIVE CAMERA APPS
- **ProCamera** shoots RAW https://www.procamera-app.com/en/
- **VSCO** cross- platform, shoots RAW https://vsco.co

SIMPLE BUT POWERFUL PHOTO EDITING APPS

- **Snapseed** (free for iPhone & Android) does the lot and easy to learn!

NOT SO SIMPLE BUT GREAT PHOTO EDITING APPS
- **VSCO** (see above) Free with basic set of high-end presets or annual subscription opens up huge collection of sophisticated presets and filters. Used widely by commercial photographers.
- **DFT** (Digital Film Tools) https://www.digitalfilmtools.com/supported-hosts/mobile.php this For advanced layering/compositing/painting Leonardo and Procreate are both excellent apps make a number of other excellent apps but here I'm referring to is the one named DFT.

APPS WITH BUILT IN PRESETS FOR SHOOTING OR POST PROCESSING
- **HIPSTAMATIC**. http://hipstamatic.com/x/ Gateway drug for iPhone photography! Basic set of retro-inspired filters and editing tools. Thousands of combinations are possible. Add-on sets may be purchased for 99p each. New set out every month. A lot of the work you saw in Nettie's presentation was made with this app.
- **TinType** (by HIPSTAMATIC) set of filters replicating the look of vintage tintype photographs. Available from same link as above.
- **6 x 6** (B & W and colour) available Apple App Store
- **Provoke** (B&W) available Apple App Store. Inspired by Japanese photographers of the 1960s
- **Lenka** (B&W) available Apple App Store
- **Noir Photo** (B & W) available Apple App Store

LAYERING AND BLENDING
- **Image Blender** Great for adding textures to photographs. Very easy to learn but only two layers can be blended at a time. available Apple App Store
- For advanced layering/compositing/painting **Leonardo** and **Procreate** are both excellent apps for iPhone and/or iPad

Removing elements from photographs
- **Touch Retouch** available Apple App Store

CROSS PLATFORM APPS

Snapseed (see above)
Adobe Lightroom
Adobe Photoshop

Solihull Photographic Society

20-21 Programme - Updated February 2021

Note:

♦ *Programme remains subject to change depending on updated official health advice.*

♦ *Some Zoom sessions and all hall based meetings will be on a Wednesday evening*

Day	Date	Meeting type*	Speaker/Event
Christmas Break			
Wednesday	06/01/2021	Zoom	Harish Chavda – Sports and landscape images
Tuesday	12/01/2021	Zoom	Member Discussion and MCPF portfolio Hand in for 3rd Aggregate
Thursday	14/01/2021	Zoom with Shirley PS	Andy Macdougal - Light and Composition in the landscape
Tuesday	19/01/2021	Zoom	3rd Aggregate - Judge Paddy Ruske
Wednesday	03/02/2021	Zoom	Verity Milligan –Birmingham based local photographer and educator
Tuesday	09/02/2021	-	*No meeting - Hand in for 4th Aggregate*
Thursday	11/02/2021	Zoom with Shirley PS	Claire Carter - The camera never lies
Tuesday	16/02/2021	Zoom	4th Aggregate - Judge Lloyd Moore
Wednesday	03/03/2021	Zoom	Andy Thorpe – People, places and things
Tuesday	16/03/2021	Zoom	Phil Savoie - Wildlife photographer and film maker formerly with BBC Natural History Unit
Wednesday	31/03/2021	Zoom	Ashley Franklin – Part 2 : Wider world of photography
			Collection for annual print competition
Monday	22/03/2021	Zoom	Interclub competition with Webheath (the hosts)
Thursday	01/04/2021	Zoom with Shirley PS	Jane Lazenby - From paintbrush to pixels
Easter Break			
Tuesday	6/04/2021	-	*No meeting - Hand in for annual DPI*
Tuesday	13/04/2021	Zoom	Annual DPI – Judge Nick Akers
Wednesday	28/04/2021	Live at hall	Annual Print – Judge Anne Sutcliffe
Wednesday	12/05/2021	Live at hall	James Kirby - Reality capture (talk postponed from last season)
Wednesday	26/05/2021	Live at hall	AGM and social

The programme continues the reciprocal arrangements with Shirley Photographic Society. We have been invited to join three of their events shown above and we will do the same for their members.