

Light, seeking light.....

'Gloaming' is one of my favourite words in the English language. It means twilight and is used in Scotland to describe that soft, gentle and faintly mysterious part of the day - also known as **the blue hour** or **fairy time**, when the light suffuses, all the colours of the day seem to melt into one and time seems suspended by a golden thread. As you can see it brings out the third rate poet in me. A real poet Robert Burns used it in his song 'Roaming in the Gloaming', Pre-Raphaelite artist William Bell Scott painted it in all its shimmering glory in a fine depiction of Ayton Castle in Berwickshire and it's even the title of song by indie rock legends Radiohead. Today there are blogs and websites run by photographers dedicated to the phenomenon who roam the country in pursuit of the strange half light and beguiling colours existing only at this special time of the day.

Looking at some of these pictures it struck me as strange that Britain is often described as grey, mainly due to the rain I suppose. In fact Britain is drenched in colour and a photographer's dream, the full vividness of which I didn't fully appreciate until I was separated from it. When I first returned to London after two years of Tokyo's concrete, neon and plastic, the sheer rush of the green, green gardens in the suburbs felt like the first kick of a powerful drug, or watching high definition television for the first time.

But someone who knows a lot more about all this than me is travel writer Paul Gogarty, author of 'The Coast Road', a description of his 3,000 mile journey around the coastline of England. He joined a debate on Britain's most beautiful, colourful locations by recommending the sunset at the Corus steel works in Port Talbot, along with Holy Island in Northumberland, Morecombe bay in Lancashire and Loch na Ceall Bay at Arisaig in Scotland. Another place renowned for its glorious colours and a must see location for serious snappers is Yorkshire sculpture park just off the M1 motorway near Wakefield in Yorkshire where your eyes and lens can feast on the startling yellow of the rapeseed fields contrasting dramatically with the heavenly blue skies.

If you are starting to feel a little dazzled, how about the other end of the spectrum? Light may be an essential for good photography but it is the arch-enemy of stargazers, who will tell us there is as much to see at night as there is during the day. Our night view these days is particularly disappointing, obscured as it is by the sickly amber glare thrown up by a million city lights. But Britain does still have a few dark corners, and darkest of all is Galloway Forest Park in southern Scotland, which came under the spotlight (!) in 2007 when it was awarded 'dark sky park' status, an accolade in the gift of the International Dark-Sky association, which seeks to identify and protect the darkest places on Earth.

Other British locations – the Brecon Beacons, Exmoor and the Peak District offer similarly outstanding viewing possibilities and the British astronomical society has produced a map showing the darkest parts of the UK. These places are perfect for those seeking to escape the light, rise above the vulgar calculations of our humdrum lives and contemplate the profound mysteries of the super-terrestrial void.

I'd better stop here; I can feel that feeble bard emerging again.

<http://britastro.org/baa/>

<http://www.gallowayforestpark.com/>

<http://www.ysp.co.uk/>

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