



Viewpoint Mike Smith

You'll be glad you spent time labelling every single item of gear when your precious equipment goes walkabout

During a climbing trip to the Llanberis Pass in North Wales, I had just hiked up to the base of some cliffs near the Pen-y-Pass youth hostel and took off my rucksack, which had my 1985 Canon Sure Shot in a padded case attached to one of the outside straps. I then got my climbing gear together and, attached to my partner, proceeded to the first part of the ascent.

At the start of the climb, I turned around in time to see a sheep walk past my rucksack and knock it over. In slow motion I saw it tumble and then bounce its way down 100 metres of rocky scree to the bottom, rolling over and over. The recovered camera didn't work but, remarkably, it was repairable.

At some point most of us have had an item of equipment broken, making for a pretty painful experience. You either have it insured or bear the brunt of repair or replacement. However, having something lost or stolen is purely frustrating, because you'd hope that there was an outside chance you'd get it back.

This was highlighted in a post by photographer Jeff Cable (<http://goo.gl/NdM8ud>), who left his Gitzo tripod on a beach in California, USA, after a shoot.

'Image searches using serial numbers in the Exif data increase your chances of being reunited with your kit'

Remarkably, after a search in the 'found' section of Craigslist, he had it returned.

So how can we maximise our chances of getting gear back? Well, as with Jeff's case, if a friendly person finds your stuff they need to be able to contact you. This has led me to label absolutely every piece of camera equipment (body, lens, tripod and so on) with my email address.

I use a Dymo label printer – the labels are sticky enough, yet can also be



Mike uses a Dymo label maker to brand every piece of his photographic kit

removed if you want to sell any gear. If you find your label peeling I've found that 3M clear Scotch tape over the top works well. If you haven't labelled your gear, then using the lost/found section on sites such as Craigslist or camera forums can help.

Of course, if your gear is stolen then the person has no intention of returning it! Your best option (and this also goes for lost gear) is to register the serial number on one of several sites such as www.cameratrace.com, www.lenstag.com or www.stolenlostfound.org. Not only does this force you to write down all your serial numbers (have you?), but it also allows you to list an item as stolen.

Image searches using serial numbers in the Exif data increase your chances of being reunited with your kit should it have been sold on. In turn, if you're intending to buy any second-hand equipment, you can minimise any potential losses by checking to see if it has been stolen.

This is a small investment in your time for a big potential gain.

Mike Smith is a creative photographer. See www.focali.co.uk for more information.

New Books

The latest and best books from the world of photography. By Oliver Atwell



Dennis Stock: James Dean

By Dennis Stock and Joe Hyams, Thames & Hudson, £24.95, 144 pages, hardback, ISBN 978-0-50054-451-8



IT'S BEEN 60 years since screen icon James Dean died at the age of just 24, when he crashed his Porsche 550 Spyder while travelling US Route 466. Dean left behind him several magnificent roles and became, in retrospect, a bastion of screen cool.

This series of images, all taken by Dean's close friend Dennis Stock, provide a moving catalogue documenting a young man on the verge of global fame.

Stock's images begin in 1954, just before filming had begun on *East of Eden*. The images also follow him on the set of *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Giant*.

Each frame is accompanied by commentary from Stock, who gives us some beautiful insights into the mind of a man poised to become one of the world's biggest film-star legends.

★★★★★

Lives of the Great Photographers

By Juliet Hacking, Thames & Hudson, £28, 304 pages, hardback, ISBN 978-0-50054-444-0



MY HEART always sinks a little when another book detailing the work of the so-called 'great photographers' lands on my desk. There are only so many times you can look at the same images and read the same stories behind them. However, this book by

Juliet Hacking is something better.

Here, she delves into the lives of the photographers behind the images. Choosing 38 photographers, Hacking provides an interesting and, at times, surprising context for the images we all know.

Most importantly, while all the usual suspects are here, Hacking finds space for a few who can often be unfairly neglected in these kinds of volumes. It is with great pleasure that you discover the biographies of figures such as Claude Cahun and Madame Yevonde.

Not a book for a lazy browse, but rather one to curl up with and fully enjoy.

★★★★★

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