

Diary of Thunderplump filming

After the concept of this project was first discussed in Summer 2021, my initial instinct was to go out and start shooting as much film as possible. Usually no more than about 10% of what you shoot actually makes it into the final cut, therefore I made a habit of ensuring I always had my camera to hand, especially given the unpredictable nature of Scottish weather. So much was this the case, that the familiarity of carrying a tripod, rucksack and camera bag soon became second nature as they began to feel more like extra limbs than merely a means of transporting equipment!

Sure enough, over the passing months, I began to build up a bank of footage from around the country, capturing a variety of moods, climates and conditions, gradually painting a picture of weather in Scotland.

One of the most ubiquitous elements found throughout these films is that of the time-lapse, and the creation of these sped-up reproductions of life resulted in a lot of hanging around as the camera patiently clicked away for as long as I still had feeling in my fingertips. Whilst this process felt very much like taking the slow road, the satisfaction of bringing these thousands of photos into the editing suite and converting hours of unfolding drama into mere seconds is something that will never lose its appeal.

With these moments of slowing down while the camera did its work, came a mixture of encounters with all sorts of people. These spanned from interesting conversations with intrigued passers by, to playing down what I was doing to drunken Glaswegians in the hope that they'd eventually lose interest and stumble back into the local Wetherspools. However, on a couple of occasions, I was definitely ambushed with a more thorough interrogation.. unbeknownst to me that I was even on private land at the time...

In the moments when there were fewer surrounding distractions, I took a picture of the set up to document the various locations I visited (occasionally with a helping hand!)...





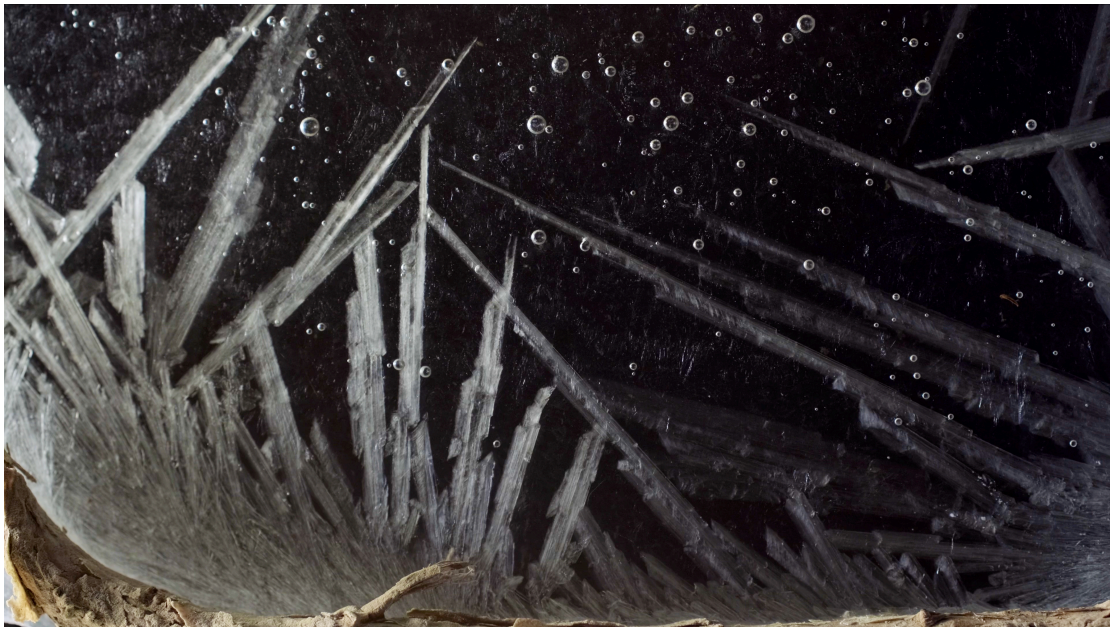
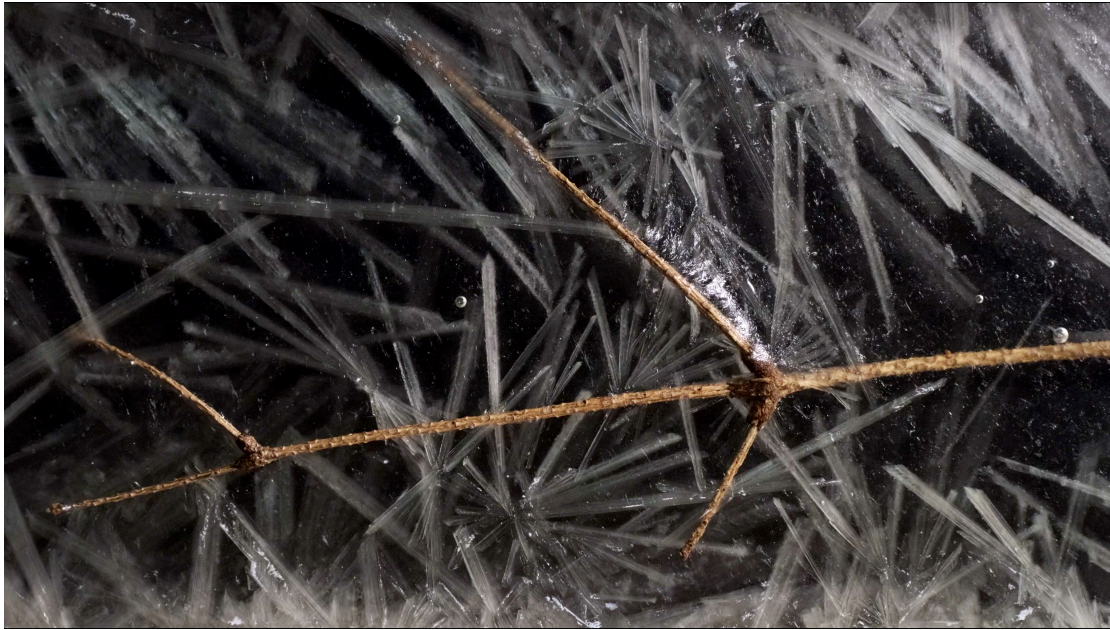
Despite the rich variety of scenery and weather conditions that Scotland can offer, there were, admittedly, shots that could only realistically be created in a studio environment. Perhaps the most intriguing of these shots were the 'ice' crystal formations. At the risk of breaking the spell, what you see in these scenes is not ice, but rather something more akin to an experiment that you may associate with a high school chemistry lesson - the formation of sodium acetate crystals to be exact. This chemical reaction allows these ice-like structures to grow more or less in real time, so once the lighting and camera angles are right, (and the several failed attempts are cast from memory) this can create some fascinating visuals. Without going into too much scientific detail, this process essentially requires the boiling up of a cocktail of various household substances for several hours until the right concentration is reached, after which a reaction can be triggered which instantly causes a solidification. Seen in normal conditions the end result looks something like this...



But with an improvised camera set up, making unconventional use of the dinner table and chairs...



...the results from the camera look somewhat different...



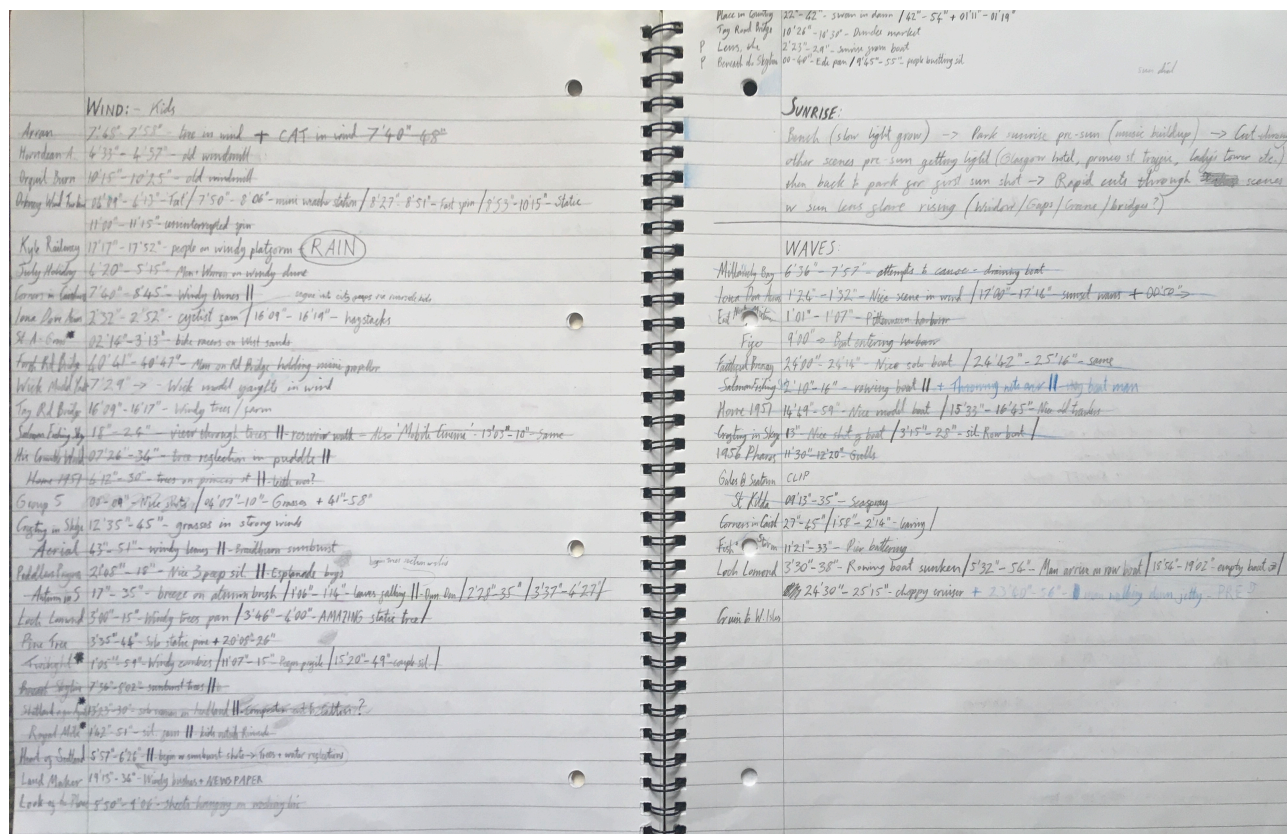
One of the significant aspects to these films was the inclusion of people. And as I gradually discovered, filming people going about their everyday lives and finding the interesting moments within that was far closer to filming wildlife than I'd first imagined. In this vein, typically, it's the moment you press the stop button that the action eventually ensues. However, with enough time spent people watching, I eventually gathered a collection of some more entertaining snapshots. Parallel to this though, are the numerous and inevitable fourth wall-breakers - a whole folder of unusable shots as people gradually noticed the camera, eyeing it down with an awkward yet curious gaze that probably lasted far longer than they'd like to remember. At these moments I always acted none the wiser, pretending to polish parts of the tripod in an effort to convince them that the camera was off and avert their attention. This didn't usually work.





Then came the archives...

As one of the key components of this project is the use of vintage footage from the Scottish Screen Archives, I proceeded to search through their catalogue of 3000+ films on the hunt for exhilarating shots of the weather in full force. This resulted in several pages of scribbled notes that looked something like this...



...a long-list of all the potential contenders, with time codes for each film outlining the specific moments when something weather-related arises. Gradually, through a process of finding clips that both mirror my own footage as well as contrast it, I whittled the list down to the shots that appear in the final films, marrying old and new as they join together to depict the timeless and relentless nature of the Scottish elements.