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NATURE'S FURY

PHOTOGRAPHER: ROBIN MOON

Back in March, Sydney was caught in the relentless deluge of an East Coast low weather system caused by La Niña.

My husband Tim and I were making our way south on an emergency trip to Jervis Bay to help our kids whose house was flooding. Halfway down the coast they rang to say they had been evacuated and we couldn't be of any immediate help. So, we stopped over in Kiama for the night as the surf forecast the next day was for a seven metre swell right on high tide - a photographer's dream forecast!

The next morning the skies were grey but dry, and we headed to one of our favourite locations, Bombo Quarry. The compositional options at the quarry are endless - from just about any position on the compass, and in a large swell there is often an incredible display of power as the water breaks over the 12m high basalt columns creating a waterfall effect. To experience it is otherworldly, and you can't help but feel you are completely isolated from the outside world even though it's just five minutes from town.

That said, it may be mesmerising to witness, but it's also very dangerous. It's not uncommon for rogue waves to crash over unsuspecting photographers and for that reason it's a location for 'safe' practises rather than heroic but foolhardy compositions.

On this morning, the waves were simply ferocious. We estimated we had about an hour to spend shooting before heading off to the (much less appealing) muddy cleanup at the house. However, the hours ticked away, and we were lost in nature's fury. Eventually, I packed away the tripod and walked further away from the columns and around to where the water entered and exited the channels out to the ocean.

It was here, about 50m off the cliff's edge, where a different pattern was erupting. The backwash from the channel was being met by the incoming swell and as both were full of furious power, the resulting collisions created beautiful wave formations. I had chosen a 'standard' lens as the columns at Bombo were so tall, and it was literally all I had. In the end, because the water action was everywhere in the frames, it was an appropriate choice.

I shot very fast because of turbulence creating a sea of whitewash, and also to control the highlights against the bright high contrast sky of late morning. I experimented with 1/2000s, but even then, the highlights were bright, and the waves were misty rather than crispy. 1/5000s allowed me to freeze the wave action, control the highlights, and with multi-shooting, capture five useable frames all depicting the construction and destruction of the wave over a period of two seconds. I just handheld the camera as waves are very forgiving to edit in terms of sharpness or softness.

What we had thought was two hours of shooting turned out to be four, and our phones were full of messages from our kids wondering where on earth we were. We decided the less they knew the better, and contentedly put away our cameras and continued south to lend a hand – a wild day indeed.

SONY A7R IV, SONY FE 24-105MM F4 LENS @ 24MM. 1/5000S @ F11, ISO 100.

