



PUTTING DOWN ROUTES

Colin Pantall meets Toby Smith, whose Environmental Bursary-winning project on the high-speed rail link, HS2, has now reached its midpoint



PASS MASTER

'This is under the M6 motorway in a very bizarre mile of Birmingham where you will have the River Tame, the M6 and HS2 all flowing together. At the moment there's a Nando's and a Travelodge in the path of the route, so nothing much is

going to be missed. Local people want HS2 here for economic reasons. There's a massive empty brownfield site that will be turned into the main maintenance depot and yard for rolling stock. So people here are excited about the jobs it's going to bring.'



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hen *The RPS Journal* caught up with Toby Smith last November, he had already begun his project HS2 – Walking the Line, funded by an Environmental Bursary from the Society and The Photographic Angle.

Since that time, he has completed his trek along phase one of the proposed high-speed rail link, the 140-mile stretch from London to Birmingham.

He plans to continue later this year, photographing from Birmingham to the route's end points in Leeds and Manchester. For the moment, though, he's keen to share with us his work and the images that he feels sum up his experience so far.

Having taken 1,500 images shot on film, keeping the editing process simple is a key factor in Smith's organisation of his work. 'I have sequenced this project geographically, because HS2 starts in London, where I live,' he says. 'Britain is very London-centric and one of the ideas behind HS2 is that it'll spread the wealth across the north-south divide.'

As Smith travelled northwards, he witnessed the disparity in wealth in very direct ways. 'What the project taught me is that, within five minutes, you can be in a completely different social and geographical landscape. The micro-changes that occur are to do with wealth and land use.' The warmth of

BRANCH NETWORK (ABOVE)

'I found this treehouse in a kind of no-man's land between the M6 and the M42.

The treehouse sums up the urban fringe because unlike others that are made of planks of wood, this one is a fusion of plywood, road signs, a fridge door and a pallet. It's an urban-wasteland version of what a treehouse should be.

HS2 will be running straight through here. There's no tragedy in that, because it's a grotty place that is neither part of the country nor part of the city.'



A QUIET DRINK
 'This picture of the pub Moriarty's in Birmingham was taken at 11am. It's right on Curzon Street, and it's Curzon Street Station that's going to be the HS2 terminal in the city.

For 100 years, the bar has been serving locally brewed mild to locals and railway and canal workers, but for the next five years it's going to be in the maelstrom of a construction site. I was there for a good

hour and a half and the landlord didn't mind that I'd been tramping through mud before I came into his pub. I could sit and have a pint and take a few pictures. That's what this image means to me.'

spirit in the urban badlands of Birmingham was in contrast with the coldness he felt in wealthy commuter villages near London. Similarly, he felt the countryside where commercial farming dominates is more dynamic than the pastoral landscapes of Buckinghamshire and beyond.

In that sense, Smith has little time for romanticised English landscape, although he does rue the fact that seasonal changes have affected what he has photographed. 'There are places I



FILLING STATION (BELOW)

'This place is called Lincoln Farm Café. It's near Solihull and is basically a massive overnight truck stop at the junction of the M5, M6 and M42. But you'd never know it was there because it's hidden away

down this small road. It's a weird combination of transport café, Christian mission and sports bar. You can tell you're in the West Midlands from the décor, and the fact that it's got nine different types of burger sauce.'



photographed in late autumn last year, and I kind of regret it because I missed some of the harvests. So instead of showing England's green and pleasant land filled with fields of wheat and barley, it's shown as a place of stubble. I'm doing the next part, the M1 corridor, in August because it can be grey enough without the greyness of the weather.'

Keep an eye on Toby Smith's website for the next stage of the HS2 project, shootunit.com

FRESH START (ABOVE)

'This place has been derelict for 60 or 70 years but it's going to be at the heart of the new development. The old red-brick building is to be given a new purpose.

West of Solihull you hear very few sob stories about HS2 because the route cuts through sites that are decrepit. Not much demolition is required until you get right to the end of the line.'



DEPTH OF FIELD (ABOVE)

'It was about six in the morning when I shot this. Because the field is so big, the woman in the picture could see me coming from her tractor before I reached her.

So there is a quietness to the photograph that you don't get in those situations where you have to grab a shot. She and I had a nice chat, and I think that experience comes across in the image.

It feels to me like a very British picture. It represents a kind of agriculture that is much more commercial, rather than the organic chickens and pretty sheep we sometimes expect.'



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TOBY SMITH

SHOOTING FROM EVERY ANGLE

How charity The Photographic Angle is getting images seen by viewers the length and breadth of Britain

Toby Smith's HS2 – Walking the Line project was made possible through the support of The Royal Photographic Society and The Photographic Angle (TPA), a charity set up to get great images seen by people from all walks of life.

TPA's main role is to stage free exhibitions in otherwise empty spaces, so that the public can enjoy the art and science of photography. It invites photographers of any background to submit images to its website, under a

range of themes. The charity's curator, Adrian Stone, then selects images for the resulting shows. TPA's chief executive Graham Carey says that the exhibitions are designed to interest and educate the general public in the art and science of photography.

TPA also co-sponsors the Environmental Bursary with the Society. Of Toby Smith's project, which received the bursary in 2013, Stone says: 'We feel a balanced perspective is of most interest to our viewing public.'

Toby's application acknowledged the benefits of a high-speed rail link, along with the inevitability of environmental impact.'

Smith's images were well composed and visually strong, adds Stone: 'We felt they would be appreciated both by experienced photographers and members of the public.'

Want to exhibit with TPA? See thephotographicangle.co.uk for more details about submitting images for an exhibition