

Audio Visual in the Community

My Photographic Volunteering Experience



Paul L.G Morris

You've probably never heard of me – I am new to both the RPS and the AV Group – but I won't hold it against you...

I have been taking photos from the mid 1960s at various levels from family snapshots to what you might call 'advanced snapshots' using an SLR camera. But I really started getting serious from 2004 when I 'went digital'; at that time I was living in a smallholding in Wales which gave a superb variety of subjects from which to learn. Moving to another smallholding in Norfolk in 2008 gave me a different set of photographic opportunities and I joined the excellent Bungay Camera Club which helped my skills improve.

I now live in Staffordshire and belong to a local camera club and a U3A photography group. It was a couple of members of this group that persuaded me to join the RPS. I don't do well in club competitions as my type of photography doesn't suit many judges but I am happy doing my own thing and learning from the guest speakers the club has. Most of my photography is of gardens and the natural/rural environment although I do experiment a lot; currently I am playing with infra-red and ultra-violet photography.

Incidentally, I have discovered that a couple of members that I knew from the Bungay club are also members of the RPS Digital Imaging (DI) Group with one recently gaining her Fellowship.

My Volunteering:

I volunteer for a large lottery funded project called Transforming the Trent Valley (TTTV) – the lead partner is Staffordshire Wildlife Trust but it is a partnership with many other stakeholders; I won't get bogged down in the detail here as there is a lot of information on the TTTV website.

You can find out much more at:

<https://www.thetrentvalley.org.uk/>



I initially got involved in volunteering for this project in 2020 (when we were permitted to get outside) as I know the project manager, Louise Morris. My first task was creating a short introductory video. In discussing with her the options of photography for the project I showed her some basic interactive virtual tours that I had done a few years previously in Norfolk. This type of virtual tour tends to be used by estate agents to show properties, hotels, golf clubs and tourist hotspots with most using 360 degree cameras to provide a full view all around and up and down. They have clickable links to other views, to show information, play a soundtrack or display fixed images. I suggested using this approach for showing walks through some of the nature reserves and other areas of interest but including 'ordinary' panoramas and views, not just the full 360° panoramas. Although I have a 360 degreecamera, I mostly use my mirrorless camera with a wide angle zoom lens to create panoramic views. To start with I was creating interactive virtual tours.

It was on a walk with other photography volunteers that I had the idea of not just producing the interactive virtual tours but to stitch the still images together into a video. I had started playing with this idea using photos of our garden but this would take the concept a lot further.

My AV projects:

A few years previously I had started with making small slide-show type of sequences using Premiere Elements but for this project serendipity stepped in: early in 2021 I was sent information about a free (for charities) workshop on digital video – I registered for the workshop where I learned about both Adobe Premiere Rush and Black Magic Da Vinci Resolve. Whereas Rush is more of an entry-level app, Da Vinci Resolve (for those that are unfamiliar) is a professional, studio grade piece of video editing software which comes in 2 levels: the free version and the paid-for Studio edition. The free version of Da Vinci Resolve is what I am currently using (I have yet to need any of the features that are in the Studio edition). The upside is that there is a whole host of professional tools with a wealth of features. The downside is that there is a whole host of professional tools that need mastering – a steep learning curve indeed.

However, the Black Magic website has a number of useful video tutorials as does YouTube although YouTube also has a fair number of un-useful videos as well!

These AV sequences (we call them Virtual Video Walks) are not a time-lapse type of video where everything rushes past and you cannot appreciate the views. They show each scene long enough to appreciate the view and see the path forward.

Audio Visual in the Community *continued ...*

So how do I create an AV project?

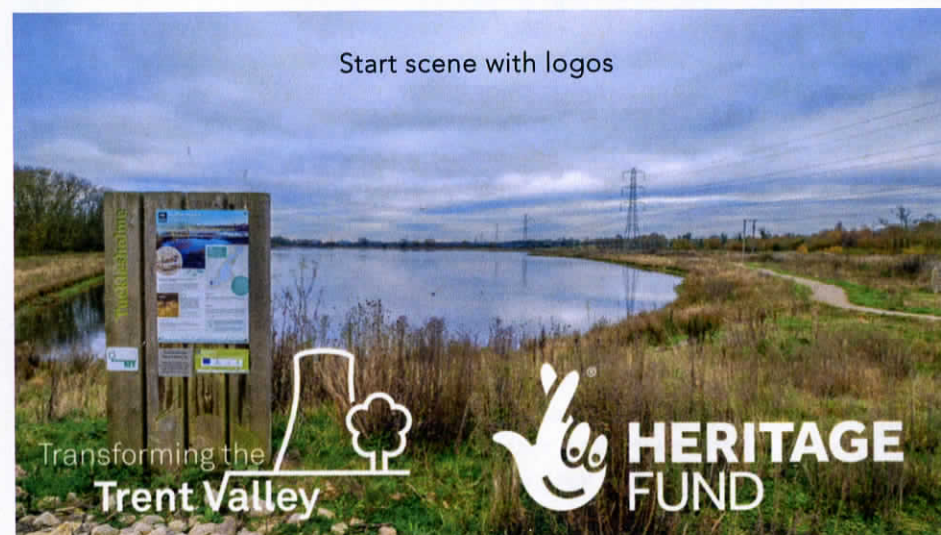
The first stage is to consider the audience.

The Wildlife Trust has members and followers of all ages from toddlers (I have also created a 'Toddler Trek' video) through to the elderly or infirm who support the Trust but cannot get out. So we need to appeal to a wide audience. We are not making TV programs and consider a 30 minute video far too long for the audience and purpose. I try to keep the running length to about 10 minutes or so.

The second stage is taking photographs!

I walk around the site following the paths. Using a wide angle zoom lens (10-24mm on my APS-C camera) I may take a single image or a few images to create a smaller panorama or a complete set to create a 360° panorama. These are usually hand-held although sometimes I do take a monopod or tripod with me. Unless I am photographing a particular scene, I try to ensure that the path forward is visible and take views that show the route and the scenery. I have also started to include some close-up views (such as berries or wild flowers) with the path or scene still visible (albeit out of focus) to provide context. I am a believer in not just showing content but showing content within context. I will typically have 100+ photos to use.

I also need to put branding on the start and end of the video (The TTTV logo and the Lottery Heritage Fund Logo) – to be consistent I copy these from a previous video – and a copyright statement at the end. (See image below)



Processing the images.

All my photos are shot in Raw using 3 bracketed exposure sets which enables me to get the best dynamic range for each scene. I use Photoshop for processing them to jpg files. Panoramas are stitched with the now obsolete AutoPano Pro – I have looked at other, more modern, software but not found anything that suits me.

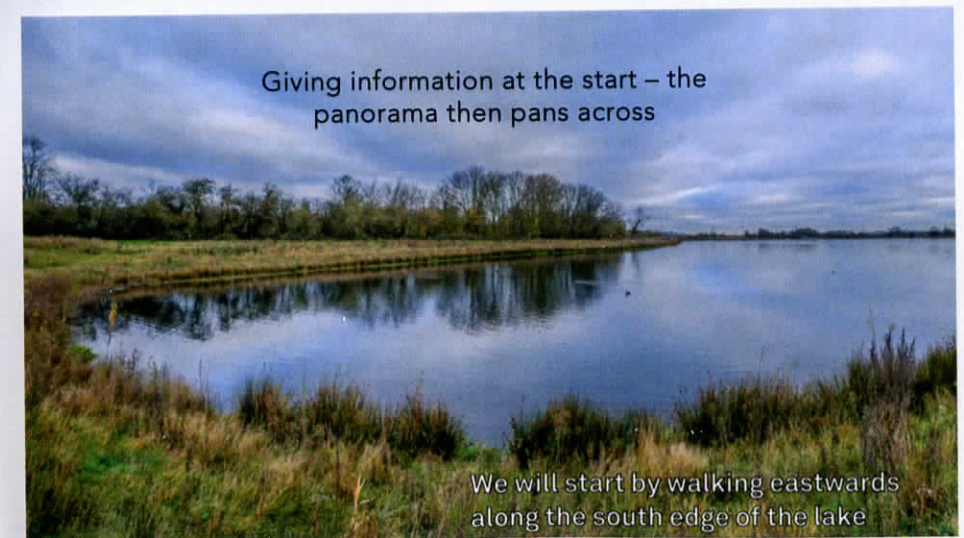
Video Editing.

As mentioned earlier, I use Da Vinci Resolve and just drag all the images into the media bin. These I pull into the timeline a few at a time. I usually show each image for 3-6 seconds. If there is something of interest I will extend the duration of the clip, zoom in, and sometimes add text to the image. For the panoramas I show them for longer to enable me to pan across the view. With the panoramas I may start showing the full width of the image, zoom into one side, then pan across. Otherwise I will start zoomed in to the full height and just pan across.

Depending on the subject I may put static titling on the image or may use a dynamic pointer that moves as the image pans but remains on the subject.

I mostly use a simple cross dissolve transition lasting between 1 & 2 seconds to provide an easy-on-the-eye movement from one scene to the next.

I don't include a voice-over soundtrack, I want the images to tell the story. For audio I use some quiet, royalty-free music which also needs its copyright statement.





The first hide at the south-eastern shore



Although late in the season, plenty of colour in some trees



Our path north

A short diversion to a WW2 pill box

Above: Showing the hide and path forward after panning across the lake.

Left: Directions for the route and a diversion to view a WW2 pill box

Middle Left: Information about the path.

Bottom Left: Scenes like this will add confidence they are following the route should they walk the path

Find virtual tours and video walks at:
<https://www.thetrentvalley.org.uk/take-part/virtual-tours/>



Above: Trees late in the autumn season.

Right: I like to show the occasional small detail.

Middle Right: The destination of a there-and-back walk

Bottom Right: I like to show detail that may be overlooked on the walk.

About the TTTV scheme partners:
<https://www.thetrentvalley.org.uk/about/scheme-partners/>



Fungi growing in a cow pat



The WW2 pill box



A stream flowing into the river



A chance encounter with a pair of swans following the course of the river



Seed heads



View from the footbridge



Audio Visual in the Community continued ...

Left: Keep your eyes open for a chance encounter .

Middle Left: Putting detail into context with seed heads

All the Photographs used are courtesy Paul L.G Morris.

Visit: <https://www.pmstudios.co.uk>

Lower Left: Putting the path into context

Below: Nearing the end and a place

Current experiments:

I mentioned earlier that I have a 360 degreecamera. I have been experimenting with this in both stills mode and video mode for the AV. For the editing with Da Vinci Resolve I have got the basics covered but have a problem with a loss of definition with the result of the edits – it looks a bit fuzzy. I am still researching this but if anyone can give advice...

AV in the community:

In conversation with one of the photography volunteers we coined the phrase 'Photography with a purpose'. This wasn't meant to imply that other photography doesn't have much of a purpose, but volunteering for a charity gives more meaning to the activity just as clearing brambles or volunteering for a hospice does.

The TTTV project covers a large area and providing all the photographs was beyond my capabilities and available time; we needed help from more photographers. I used the good offices of my camera club to circulate a note to other local camera clubs asking for volunteers. This produced some recruits from my camera club and a few from another. A couple of volunteers came via other means. As one of the aims of TTTV is Community Engagement this was a double win. Using the work of these photographers I have created a large online library of still images – this is created using jAlbum – along with another AV showcasing some of their photos – this incorporates at least 2 images from each volunteer photographer irrespective of their level of skill.

From what I have observed, there is a large number of organisations that could benefit from photographers with some skill. Not long before I moved away from Norfolk the camera club started doing some photography for a local hospice. Not every organisation is aware that there are good photographers in the community willing to volunteer and fewer would even think about AV. So, if you are interested in volunteering your skills and some of your time you need to do a bit of research and approach the organisation.

Finally:

I put the video on YouTube as a private item and notify the members of the TTTV team so they can check it before it is made public. A link is also added to the main website.

The TTTV YouTube channel can be found at:

<https://www.youtube.com/@TheTrentValley/videos>

