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[ROSS HODDINOTT](#) [COMMENT](#)

It is easy to get into bad habits, isn't it? For example, most landscape photographers have a nasty habit of being over-reliant on wide-angle lenses. Wide-angles are considered to be the "landscape lens" due to their ability to capture big, far-reaching vistas and exaggerate the size and impact of foreground objects and dramatic skies. However, if you only ever use one type of lens for your landscape photography – or restrict yourself in any way – your photographs will grow predictable and formulaic. Whilst wide-angles will always be the mainstay of a [landscape photographer's kit bag](#), don't overlook longer focal lengths. In fact a medium telephoto or tele-zoom – in the region of 70-200mm – can prove to be a highly effective and versatile landscape lens. Let me explain why.

Your choice of focal length has a huge impact on how you record the landscape and the look and emphasis of your shots. Wide-angles might be the best choice in many instances, but their ability to stretch perspective is not always a desirable one. They effectively diminish the size and importance of features within the landscape that are

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What is a telephoto lens? Well, generally speaking, anything longer than 50mm is considered to be a telephoto. Being more powerful, they enable photographers to isolate detail and interest within the landscape. Despite this ability, telephotos are often overlooked by landscape enthusiasts. This is partly due to landscape photographers being conditioned by numerous photography books and magazine articles to always think wide-angle. Longer focal lengths can prove more effective for many scenes, though.

Not only do longer lenses have the ability to highlight detail, shape and form within the landscape, but they also appear to compress or foreshorten perspective. Whilst (technically speaking) long lenses do not actually compress perspective, they certainly can create this impression. Perspective is simply an effect of camera-to-subject distance: the further you are from your subject, the smaller the gap appears to be between it and its background. To successfully shoot more distant landscapes, you need a longer lens, so telephotos have understandably become closely associated with the visual effect of foreshortening.

 [10 Things to Keep in Your Camera Bag](#)

detail, repetition and patterns found in the landscape. They are a good choice when you are seeking structure or simplicity within a chaotic environment. This is because they allow you to exclude unnecessary elements from your composition and instead focus on layers within the landscape, shape and form. Telephoto compression will help a hilly or mountainous backdrop appear larger and more imposing, and create a 'stacked' effect – where objects appear pushed up closer to one another. A focal length in the region of 70-200mm is ideal for shooting rural scenes, allowing photographers to highlight shapely trees or place emphasis on interesting buildings and landmarks within the landscape.

Avoid the temptation to frame too tightly, though. Instead, I recommend you try to retain a degree of breathing space and capture the subject in context with its surroundings. For example, if you are photographing a church set within rolling countryside, consider placing it strategically on an intersecting third and include enough of its surroundings to convey a proper sense of place. The building should act as a key point of interest and anchor the composition, without being so dominant that the eye never bothers to explore the rest of the frame. A telephoto zoom (opposed to a prime lens) is a good choice, allowing you to quickly adjust focal length in order to fine-tune composition without needing to physically change lens.

nearby that would appear distracting or inappropriate. Placing emphasis on the landscape is also an effective way to obscure boring skies. They also appear to exaggerate the effects of haze, fog and mist and on misty mornings I will typically opt for a telephoto length to help emphasize the moody conditions.

Colmers Hill, pine trees growing on hill top, morning mist, near Bridport, Dorset, UK.
September 2012.

Longer focal lengths are well suited to shooting tree avenues and woodland interiors too. They effectively reduce the gaps between trunks and appear to exaggerate the density of a colourful carpet of wild flowers, like bluebells. Personally, I always keep a 70-200mm tele-zoom in my camera bag, and occasionally an 80-400mm if I think I might need the extra reach. Using longer focal lengths does present a few technical considerations, though. Telephotos provide less depth of field, although as the landscape is more distant, working with a shallower zone of focus rarely presents any serious issues, and you should be able to select a mid-range aperture of f/8 or f/11 (where most lenses perform at their sharpest) without any problem. However, when using longer focal lengths, any flaw in your technique will be exposed and there is little leeway for error

Bluebells {Hyacinthoides non-scripta} carpeting floor of beech woodland with ferns, West Woods, Marlborough, Wiltshire, UK. May 2013.

A focal length of 100mm or longer is also well suited to shooting silhouettes, providing the power to isolate subjects with strong, instantly recognizable outlines – like trees, building or iconic landmark. Longer focal lengths also suit creative techniques like [Intentional Camera Motion](#) (ICM) – which involves moving the camera during exposure to create a more impressionistic interpretation of the landscape. ICM often relies on strong shapes and colour for impact and success, and using a telephoto will help achieve this.

A telephoto more than justifies its place in a landscape photographer's kit bag, providing needed versatility and endless creative options. Still not convinced? Try [long lens landscapes](#) yourself and you will soon consider a telephoto as an integral part of your landscape kit.

Ross Hoddinott

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Ross Hoddinott is among the UK's best-known landscape and natural history photographers. He is a multi-award-winning photographer and the author of several bestselling photography titles, including *The Landscape Photography Workshop* (with Mark Bauer). Based in Cornwall, Ross is best known for his images of the South West of England, but he travels all over the UK in search of outstanding views and atmospheric conditions. He is a Nikon Alumni, an Ambassador for Manfrotto and a Global Icon for F-Stop Gear. Ross

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