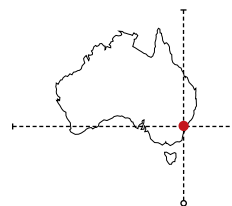




Heart of the Nation

One remarkable by-product of Instagram, the wildly popular photo-sharing social network, is the real-world friendships it fosters. Matt Horspool regularly convenes “InstaMeets”, where a bunch of photographers who follow each other’s work online go on an outing together. They’ve been to derelict railway tunnels, dark-sky locations for astrophotography, spectacular rock formations on NSW’s Sapphire Coast, Mungo National Park and waterfalls galore. “You feed off each other,” Horspool says of the creative cross-pollination that occurs. “Everyone sees things differently, and shoots differently.” He adds, with a laugh: “It’s not competitive – but it *is*.”

The 31-year-old special-needs teacher took the honours for this shot on a trip with three Instagram friends to Mount Keira



Mount Keira 2500

Lookout, south of Sydney. They’d arrived at dawn, hoping for moody fog, but the weather wasn’t playing ball so they improvised instead. Horspool had an idea for his friend Mario, sporting a striking yellow jacket, to fill an umbrella with leaves then swing it over his head; all four collaborated on multiple takes over half an hour before Horswell got this perfect capture.

Of course, with every attempt Mario got a faceful of wet leaves, but that’s par for the course. The softly spoken Indonesian guy, who’s in Australia studying, is always keen to oblige when a shot requires a human subject. They once made him stand on an ocean point lashed by crazy waves; another time, he swam out across the freezing waters of Lake Jindabyne at dawn to pose on a rock for them. Why does Mario always get the short straw? “Because he’s a push-over,” Horspool laughs.