Novoflex TrioPod System

A Field-based Review

Robert Thompson

NOVOFLEX TRIOPOD SYSTEM

The TrioPod -M with the ClassicBall 5 II.

GENERAL OVERVIEW

The Novoflex TrioPod series first appeared back in 2013. In many ways it was an innovative approach to tripod design and one that no other tripod manufacturer had considered. The design team at Novoflex obviously decided to take a different approach. They clearly studied a tripod's many applications and how best to design a system that is interchangeable and would meet the needs across the whole photographic platform. Photographers these days often cover a range of topics and shoot a diversity of subjects in many different environments. When you think about it, you buy into a camera system; you don't change the camera every time you add a lens so why should you not consider investing in a tripod system.

The TrioPod concept has clearly been well received and Novoflex have added to the system since then, making it more comprehensive and extensive by introducing additional spider bases to cater for other photographic disciplines. The TrioBalance was launched in 2015 which was another unique spider base with an integrated levelling base clearly aimed at landscape and panoramic photographers. Building on

TRIOPOD 2013

TRIOPODBALANCE 2015

TRIOPOD PRO 75 2017

TRIOPOD-M 2019

The TrioPod series showing all of the different spider bases. The TrioPod PRO 75 can take a geared centre column if required. The TrioPod-M includes the centre column which is removable.

the original concept they also introduced the TrioPod-PRO 75, their flagship professional model in 2017. The PRO 75 is the most advanced of the spider TrioPod range. It offers exception stability and is capable of bearing an extremely heavy load capacity.

The TrioPod-M is the latest professional tripod added to the system and is primarily aimed at photographers who use medium-heavy equipment. Along with the TrioPod PRO 75, it forms the core of the their innovative, modular design system. No other tripod offers you the flexibility that this system does. In reality, you are not buying an individual tripod but investing in a system that lets you add and choose the configuration you need to use when carrying out a particular task. The TrioPod system is available in four different base versions. Its unique design, flexibility and ease of use make it the most versatile tripod system for photographers who need and demand the best from their equipment.

I have been using the TrioPod-M and PRO 75 systems, among other Novoflex equipment for a while now. The design and fabrication, in my opinion, is unequalled anywhere in the tripod manufacturing sector. Since the TrioPod is a modular system, there is no wrong choice; all of the components are interchangeable and can be adapted to any photography genre. However, if your primary interest is macro the TrioPod-M four-section is, in my opinion the ideal tripod unit for this genre of photography. It has exceptional stability and enough height and versatility to cover the vast majority of situations in the field. It is also very portable without being too cumbersome. When fully closed, it is only 56cm, making it easily transported on your backpack. The beauty of this highly versatile system is you can purchase, as accessories, the full range of additional leg sizes, which are interchangeable between the TrioPod-M, TrioPod PRO 75 and the QuadroPod systems to meet your various needs.

Fire Salamander *Salamandra salamandra*
These shy amphibians spend most of their time among ground vegetation and under mossy logs. Its important to be able to get right down to their level. You can see the subject towards the edge of the frame. The TrioPod with the mini legs are ideal when you need to move quickly; they are easily maneuvered into position.

The ClassicBall 5 II provides excellent stability when working with the 105mm and the 200mm macro lenses.

Listed here are the technical specifications for the carbon fibre TrioPod-M four-section tripod. You can find the specifications for the other units in the series on the Novoflex website. They are essentially the same, except for the leg lengths and choice of material, carbon fibre or aluminium.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

The TrioPod-M series carbon fibre comes in four different configurations; there is also an aluminium version in some models as well.

1. Four-section, maximum working height including centre column (175cm or 68.9in).

2. Four-section compact maximum working height including centre column (152cm or 59.8in).

3. Three-section maximum working height including centre column (180cm or 70.9in).

4. Five-section maximum working height (133cm or 52.4 inches).

FOUR-SECTION TRIOPOD-M

Single legs: 49,5cm-158cm (19.5″-62.2″)
Max. Working height (with centre column): 175cm (68.9")
Min. Working height: 6,5cm (2.6") (when using the exchangeable mini legs)
Folded Length: 56cm (22")
Max. load capacity: 60 lbs
Upper threaded stud: 3/8"-16
Centre column: 1/4"-20 and 3/8"-16
Lateral accessory connection: 1/4"-20 and 3/8"-16, additional screw-in possibility for rods and mini legs
Resting angle of the leg connectors: 20 °, 40 °, 60 °, and 87 °
Diameter of the leg segments (mm): 27.9 (1.1"); 24.9 (0.98"); 21.9 (0.86"); 18.9 (0.74")
Total weight: 1,745g (3.8lbs)

Unscrewable steel spikes underneath the rubber caps
Exchangeable mini legs and tripod bag included
Due to the interchangeability of the legs, the set enables the flexible construction of the following tripod variants:

- Tripod with 175cm working height
- Mini-table stand or tripod for ground-level work
- Monopod
- "Leaning Pod" - Use of 2 Mini Legs and one of the longer legs

There are also tripod leg extensions sold separately which can extend the tripod by an additional 50cm (19.69 inches).

The beauty of the TrioPod system is being able to change your configuration to suit the type of photography you are doing. I carry all of the legs in the TrioPod case which means they are always accessable when needed.

In this case, I was photographing on the coast. Changing the legs to the three-section units provided sufficient height to deal with incoming waves.

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TrioPod-M Spider Base

The TrioPod-M spider base is the heart of this and their other modular tripod systems. Novoflex has cleverly designed a range of units that support other photographic disciplines. Any configuration from the whole TrioPod range can be interchanged between spider base units. For example, you can switch from shooting macro to landscape and panoramic photography using many of the specially designed components ensuring you get the best possible outcomes with your photography. The build quality is of course superb, and the unit is colour-coded in the familiar Novoflex branding colours of space grey and blue, which coordinates with their other product lines. When you hold this unit in your hand it exudes quality in every aspect of its fabrication; the attention to detail is synonymous with Novoflex's reputation of quality and precision.

The spider TrioPod-M has a larger base diameter than the standard TrioPod unit. The weight of the spider block with the centre column in place is 650g (1.4lbs) and without 459g (1.09lbs). The maximum load capacity is also impressive at 60lbs, which is more than the vast majority of photographers are ever likely to need. The 80mm diameter platform is ideally suited to larger ball heads, in particular, the ClassicBall 5 II. The photographer has the option of a plain base, or an adjustable centre column which is included in the TrioPod-M kit. The screw base adapter can be quickly removed and swapped with the supplied centre column, which will increase the working height by an additional 27cm. For macro work, the column is not needed, in my opinion, as you want the maximum stability when shooting close-ups and focus stacking. If the central column is in place, the maximum carrying capacity reduces from 30kg to 5kg when the column is fully extended. The three lateral leg connections provide resting angles of 20°, 40°, 60° and 87°, which allows the tripod legs to lie flat at ground level, which is ideal for shooting macro subjects close to, or at ground level.

Top right
The TrioPod four-section complete with the central column. The column is easily removed and the central screw pushes into place. You have a choice of 1/4 or 3/8 screw for connecting the tripod head. Included with the TrioPod system is the three mini legs and the carrying case.
Bottom right
The ClassicBall 5 II complete with the Q=Clamp, which is ideally suited to the TrioPod-M base and provides a very stable platform for general and macro photography.

Leg information and specifications

The standard leg diameter of the carbon fibre leg columns in the TrioPod-M four-section are 27.9 (1.1in); 24.9 (0.98in); 21.9 (0.86in); 18.9 (0.74in). The eight-layer carbon fibre design provides excellent stability even at full height. The base leg segments are marked at 5cm (2.in) sections which are designed to assist you when you need to extend the legs evenly. All of the legs carry the 1/4" male thread in the TrioPod series and are completely interchangeable between each spider base unit. They can also be used on the flagship TrioPod PRO 75. Each set of legs also contain fixed-steel spikes concealed underneath the rubber caps, giving you the option of dual stability depending on the terrain the tripod is resting on.

Another nice touch is the foam sections on all of the legs which is useful when carrying it for long periods of time in winter. Many tripod manufacturers place it on a single leg only which is fine if you have no equipment attached to the tripod. It can be more annoying when camera and lens are attached as the most comfortable balance might not necessarily be on the leg with the foam on it!

Top right
The various leg extension that are available for the TrioPod system. All of these are completely interchangeable between all of the TrioPod spider bases including the flagship Pro 75.Included in the image is the walking pole and the mini TrioPod leg.
Centre
The leg extensions should you require extra length in certain situations.They are especially useful when photographing in mountain locations where you may find yourself standing on a rocky ledge or slope and need the extra leg length to gain height and support.
Bottom right
The TrioPod provides dual ground support in the form of a spike and a rubber base, which is easily removed and pushed back into place when not required. Since the spike is already secured into the leg you can alternate between the two depending on the terrain you are working in.

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Centre column

The TrioPod-M comes with a central column that has a 1/4" and a 3/8" fitting to accommodate either fixture for the camera and head. You can remove it if you prefer to attach your tripod head directly to the spider base. Another nice touch which, is especially relevant to macro is being able to invert the column to allow the camera to work completely at ground level. There are many smaller subjects that are only a few centimetres high, which is always challenging when you want to shoot through the ground foliage, or have you camera parallel to the subject. The vertical height of the head and the camera means it's not possible to get your camera completely flat to the ground. Inverting the column is a quick procedure and it is easily carried with you when you need to get a low as possible.

Top left
The TrioPod-M central column with the spider base. Unscrewing the screw at the bottom allows you to invert, or remove the column. You can push in the central fixture, shown in the diagram, which slides in to place allowing you to attach a tripod head.
Above
One of the most useful features in the TrioPod-M is being able to reverse the centre column when you really need to get the camera right down virtually on the woodland floor as in this case. The moth was resting right on the base of the root of the tree. A conventional ball head even on a tripod that can go flat to the ground would still make it difficult to get the camera back parallel to the subject. Having the ability to reverse the column is also extremely useful when you are photographing small ground flowers and you want to be able to blur the foreground by shooting through the vegetation. Reversing the column is quick and simple.

Mini legs

An extremely useful and clever idea is the additional mini legs included in all of the TrioPod kits. These can be screwed into the lateral walls of the base, or attached directly to the spider leg attachments. When all three are fitted you have a minimum height of 6.5cm. These are invaluable when you are faced with situations that make it difficult to place the tripod legs in the ideal position to achieve the shot. Removing a leg or even two will allow you to take advantage of a whole range of configurations at or near ground level, which can be challenging with conventional tripods. You can also use the base with the attached mini legs as a table-top tripod. It is extremely stable whether on a table or the ground. Should you require extra stability, for example, on windy days you can attach the mini legs into the side of the spider hub and hang your backpack on for additional steadiness. Or when photographing at the coast where you can't place your backpack on the rocks.

Above
The mini legs come as part of the TrioPod kits. They are easily carried in your backpack. I have found these to be really useful when I need to work a lot at ground level. I find it faster to use the ground pod than manoeuvring the tripod into position. The macro set-up is very stable with the mini legs even when using the heavier 200mm macro .
Top right
Situations such as this are always challenging for tripods when up tight against a tree trunk. Removing a leg and replacing it with a mini solves the problem.
Bottom right
The mini legs in place and the ClassicBall 5 II provides a very stable platform for working subjects at ground level.

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Carrying case

Novoflex also includes a carrying case for the TrioPod systems. It's extremely well-constructed with an adjustable strap and additional pocket for accessories. It has an internal blue lining and naturally colour-coded with the brand. There is also room to carry additional legs in the bag, which is a good idea. I keep mine in my jeep with all of the leg sizes and other accessories which gives me access in the field to whatever configuration I might need.

The carrying case is well constructed and designed in the Novoflex branding. It can easily accommodate additional legs and other accessories that you may want to carry.

Top right

The TrioPod- M leg with the small Novoflex ball head and plate when you need to travel light or react to changing situations quickly.

TrioPod versatility

Novoflex has always been well-known for its innovative thinking. Therefore it comes as no great surprise that the TrioPod functions as an all-in-one system. I have already mentioned its interchangeability between other accessories, but it is capable of more than providing tripod support. The company also includes an additional base when connected to any leg becomes an effective monopod for those situations where a rapid response is called for, or in a situation where it can be difficult to work with a tripod. The monopod acts in these situations as a third leg including the two of your own and is a much better alternative than no support at all. When walking and photographing in mountainous regions the legs can be quickly converted to poles without the need to carry additional ones therefore reducing weight. The spider base and other leg can be stored in your bag.

One of the advantages of the ClassicBall II is it's ability when inverted to become a levelling base. It also makes an excellent head for the monopod without the need to carry another with you. Also it's a better option when stalking insects on the move since you can adjust the friction to suit the weight of the camera and lens.

The TrioPod can also be effectively converted into a leaning pod, utilising the mini legs in tight situations. For example, a wall where you can't get the legs close enough for the lens to clear it, or working on fallen logs, or the trunks of trees which can also be problematic. The leaning pod copes extremely well in these awkward spots. Removing one or two legs and replacing them with mini alternatives usually overcomes these problems. They can also be used very successfully when scouting locations along a road. The leaning pod will sit on securely on crash barriers should you want to make a quick stop and you need to shoot from a lower position. It is also much quicker to place them than trying to manipulate legs around or over crash barriers. As already mentioned, you can replace all the legs with the mini versions and you have a highly stable tabletop tripod or a ground pod for subjects that are on or close to the ground.

Top left

The leaning pod is a versatile option when a conventional tripod maybe awkward to use. It can adapt quickly to most situations for example, when you need to avoid a wall, or in this case a crash barrier, or when working flat to the ground.

Above

Fallen tree trunks often pose a problem when you need to get in close and the legs are in the way. I often find this problem when photographing fungi growing on the trunk surface. Mini legs are an ideal solution to this problem.

Rosy Maple moth *Dryocampa rubicunda*
What impresses me the most when shooting routine macro subjects is the stability and flexibility of the tripod and ball head. Unlike other ball heads, the ClassicBall 5 II has three drop slots which means you have 180° movement without having to rotate the body of the head around to access the slot. Even working at higher magnifications the set up remains solid with no movement.

IN THE FIELD

Form a personal point of view, the ultimate test on any piece of equipment is how it performs in the field and if it meets my expectations. My opinion is based on the actual usage of a product over some time and in different situations. Many photographers assume that the most difficult task is choosing the right camera and the relevant lenses. What they fail to realise is that selecting an inadequate tripod can not only put their valuable gear at risk but can also fail to live up to their expectations.

I prefer to carry a tripod in my hand rather than strapped to my backpack but that's just me and the way I like to work. The TrioPod four-section is relatively compact in size and was more than comfortable to carry. I did not at any time feel it was cumbersome in

Orange Sea Lichen *Caloplaca marina*
The test of any macro set up in my opinion is its ability to resolve fine detail. Lichens are one of the most challenging subjects to record every minute aspect. I have proved this time and again. At first glance it may appear sharp, but when enlarged you begin to see softness in the fine detail of the crust. Some of the smaller species I have to focus stack as a result of employing higher magnifications. I do a lot of this type of photography so this is critical for me. The TrioPod combined with the MagicBall or CalssicBall 5 II head provides excellent stability with no creep.

any way. I found it quick to erect and position; its stability was excellent whether it was at full height or flat to the ground. Used in combination the ClassicBall 5 II, provided solid support for my Nikon 200mm macro which is one of the older, heavier AF lenses. I also shoot a lot of landscape photography especially on coastal locations. In these situations I am frequently having to look and photograph the lichen and plant communities on the shoreline to. I normally have the four-section legs on the TrioPod and carry the three-section units with me in my backpack. I can switch between them as and when I need to.

Above

Being able to configure your set up to meet the needs of the task you are undertaking is one of the great advantages of buying into a system. In this situation I quickly swapped the four-sectioned legs for the taller three sectioned units. The advantage is you have the additional height should you need it. The smaller four-sectioned legs fit neatly into my photographic backpack.

The TrioPod-M combined with the ClassicBall 5II give you the option to shoot panoramics. Removing the head and screw to the Q=Clamp lets you invert the head and you now have a levelling base. If you know you are likely to be shooting a lot of pano's you can simply keep the head in this position and you have the best of both worlds.

Left

The setup and tripod position for shooting the image above.

The design of this ball head really did impress me a lot. I have to say that this is my preferred choice when undertaking routine macro and general landscape photography. The stability and versatility of this head is exceptional in my opinion. Even with a sizeable weight placed upon it there is no creep whatsoever. Having 120° of movement makes it an ideal choice for general photography.

The MagicBall ball head is another unique and clever innovation which works well with the TrioPod series. I like its design and use this head a lot when I need more flexibility shooting close-ups. I find it really useful in challenging situations where you need that little more versatility. A simple twist of the handle lock it firmly in place. It's absolutely solid when locked, with no creep so you do not need to over compensate when composing, which I have found to be the case with many other heads. It is also an excellent choice for general photography It gives the photographer 120° movement in virtually any plane. I find the stability and ease of use from this ball head to be outstanding even when I am using a heavy setup that incorporates the Castel-Micro when focus stacking. The MagicBall (The Big One) does not have pre-set friction setting, but you can adjust the friction on the ball manually.

I also like to use a 300mm Nikon lens with extension tubes for some of my flower photography, but I found no issues relating to instability

A focus stacked image of the inside of this very small tulip flower showing the stamens and column. At almost twice life-size and a total stack of 55 images, having absolute stability during each shot is paramount to render the finer details. The TrioPod-M, Castel-Micro electronic stepping rail and the ClassicBall 5 II were used to make the composite image.

from the TrioPod whichever leg combination I use; this is important when it comes to focus stacking and when working at higher magnifications. Even the slightest movement between shots can compromise the final sequence; this is absolutely critical for me and some of the work I do.

One of the real benefits of this system is the ability to change the tripods configuration in the field quickly without having to resort to additional tripods or having to carry a lot of excess gear on the expectation that you might need it. Having the mini arms and any reservations that they might not provide solid stability were quickly quashed when I used them. Being able to remove any of the standard legs and replace them with the mini units quickly is a real game-changer for me. It avoids the frustrations of trying to manoeuvre or place the legs of a tripod where they don't want to go.

Wideangle macro is becoming a popular approach these days. One of the challenges is the extremely close working distance between the lens and subject. Using the Laowa 15mm wideangle macro means your lens to subject distance can be down to millimetres. Keeping the tripod legs out of the frame can be problematic sometimes. Using the smaller TrioPod legs solves this problem.

Another handy feature is the dual rubber feet and intergraded spikes. When in the field and for extra stability, you can simply pull off the rubber feet and the spikes are already locked in place. The rubber feet can be quickly pushed back over the spikes when not required; a simple, but useful solution when working in different terrains. To be honest most photographers can't be bothered to continually swap between the two. What is also advantageous about the TrioPod system is when travelling by air you do not have to struggle to get your tripod into your bag or case; this is something that I frequently fight with when photographing and running workshops abroad. You can carry the spider base onboard in your backpack and the legs can be placed in your case with ease; you can even carry an additional set in a different size with you if necessary.

Wideangle Macro is one of the most challenging aspects of macro photography. The working distance between lens and subject is often

down to millimetres. The legs of virtually all conventional tripods become visible in the frame and it takes quite a bit of manoeuvring to eliminate them from the field of view, which sometimes means compromising on your composition. Not so with this system. Switching legs to the smaller carbon fibre units or employing the mini legs and the problem is eliminated with no compromise on stability.

A FINAL WORD

Tripod design has come a long way since the predigital era. The development and incorporation of new materials such as carbon fibre in tripod construction along with better portability and function are important factors these days for most photographers. One thing we have learned that weight is not necessarily conducive to stability, but the importance of design and the materials used are the key factors.

The TrioPod-M system, in my opinion, meets the professional standards that photographers expect in every aspect and then some. As an owner of seven tripods and none of them cheap. The question for me was where they all now redundant? I can also hear you ask the question why so many? Some were better suited to certain tasks than others, however, I was never able to find one that met all of my needs until now. I'm pretty sure I am not the only photographer out there that has stockpiled a collection of them over the years. We tend to fall into the trap of focusing all of our attention into selecting the right camera system with only moderate consideration to what is going to support it! Inevitably the decision in many cases is related to price, which is where we make the mistake. We are of course happy to spend what it takes to acquire the ideal camera but for many tripod selection is centred around what's left financial budget.

Could I see myself using any of the other tripods on a frequent basis again.? Being honest and up front, I would have to say extremely unlikely. As a natural history photographer I have to cover many different subjects, from landscapes, to working in caves and photographing the flora and fauna.

Having a system (rather than a single tripod) such as the TrioPod series meets all of my requirements and the diversity of situations I am likely to find myself working in. The uniqueness and design of this system surpasses what's currently out there. The stability along with portability in any of the configurations I use is exceptional in my opinion. Using the ClassicBall 5 II with heavy setups which include the Castel-Micro and a combination of different lenses provide an extremely stable platform for focus stacking at greater magnifications in the field; this is something which is extremely important to me and some of the work I do. It is also where many other tripods and heads fail and photographers get frustrated with the results. There is nothing more annoying when an exceptional opportunity presents itself and the result is compromised due to inadequate equipment or instability especially in macro where you are often shooting at speeds that require tripod support. We have all been there at some point. Speaking from experience we seldom get the opportunity to reshoot subjects so it's important to get the right result first time round. Well-crafted and designed equipment is never cheap, but investing in a system that allows you to expand on it will last for many years to come and will save money in the long-term.

My current setup for photographing up to 2:1 using the TrioPod-M, Castel-Micro and the ClassicBall 5 II.

NOVOFLEX TRIOPOD SERIES

TRIOPOD

TRIOPOD-M

TRIOPOD PRO 75

TRIOBALANCE

Further Information

Cat's-eyed Emperor *Aurivillius aratus*

Further information on the TrioPod series and the TrioPod-M can be obtained through the following distributors

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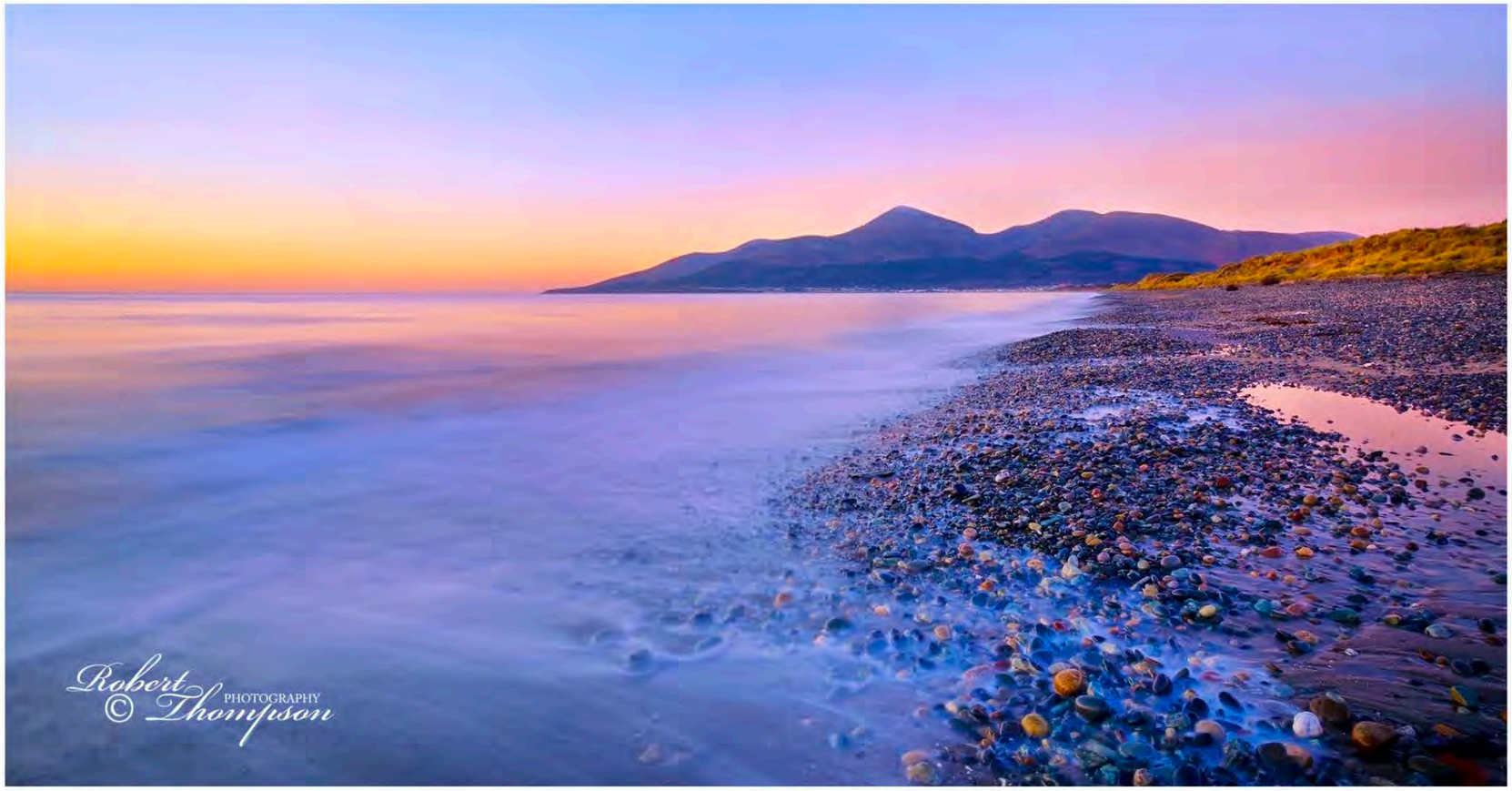

Dawn light on the Mourne Mountain from Murlough beach, County Down.

Robert Thompson is a professional freelance natural history photographer, author and naturalist. He is a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society and the Irish Photographic Federation; an acclaimed macro specialist in the UK and author of a number of books on natural history and photography. His work is widely published in the UK, Ireland and internationally, with numerous photographic credits in a wide variety of publications and other media sources. He is a frequent writer and contributor to the photographic press and other natural history publications; has had several solo exhibitions of his work. He runs workshops in Ireland and Europe and has a special interest in insects and the declining wild orchid populations in his own country and further afield.

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