

ILFORD FP4 PLUS

A Medium-Speed B&W Film in All Formats

by Jack and Sue Drafaahl

PHOTOGRAPHIC'S USER REPORT

We should tell you up front that we usually test *color* films for PHOTOGRAPHIC Magazine. While we both started out with black-and-white film, we migrated over the years toward recording life in the color lane. When we were asked to test Ilford's new black-and-white film, we said, "Sure, we love testing film—any film." Ilford's newest FP4 Plus 120/220 film gave two color photographers a new perspective on the world of black-and-white photography.

THE ORIGIN OF FP4 PLUS

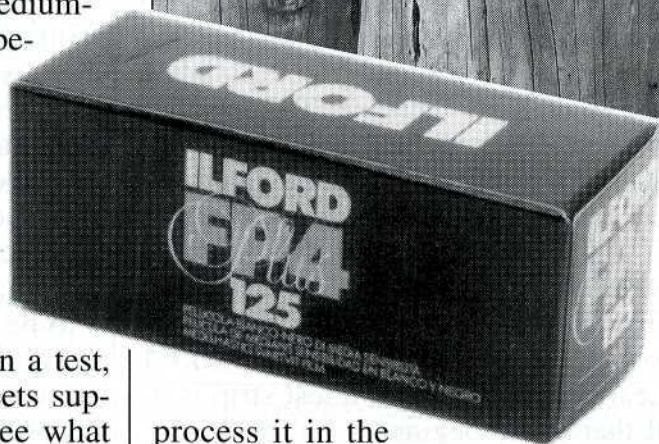
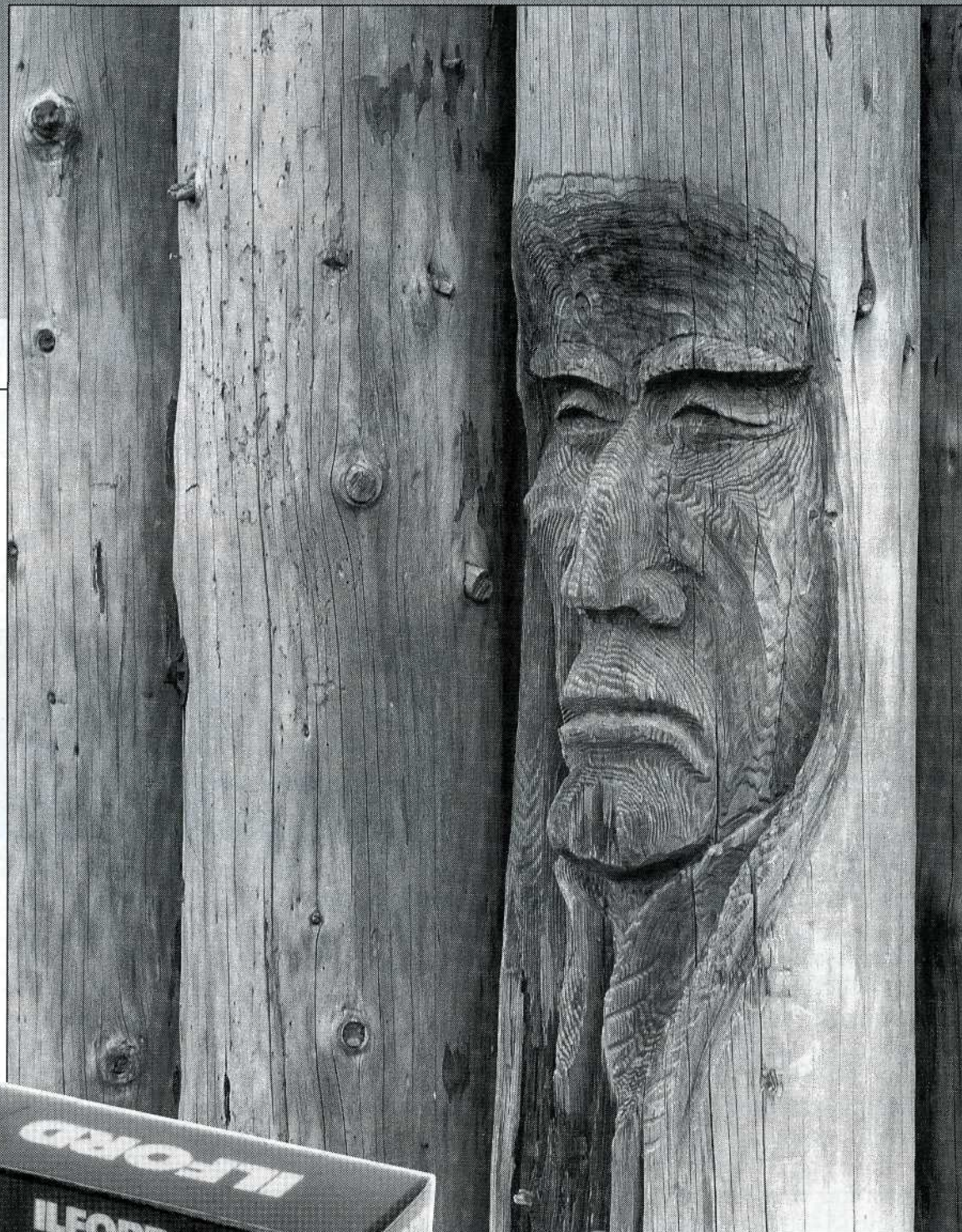
FP4 Plus was introduced at the 1991 PMA (Photo Marketing Association) show, and its popularity steadily increased over the next two years. As more and more photographers became aware of its potential, the need for medium-format and sheet-film versions became apparent to Ilford. In December, 1992, Ilford announced the availability of FP4 Plus in 35mm, 120/220, and a complete range of sheet-film formats. We tested the 120 version.

"PREFLIGHT" CHECK

Before taking any film out on a test, we read all the information sheets supplied by the manufacturer to see what the film is *supposed* to do. Boiling this information down to the basics, we were able to ascertain that FP4 Plus is a high-resolution, fine-grain, medium-contrast black-and-white film designed for general applications. FP4 Plus has a medium-speed ISO rating of 125, but can be exposed from EI 50–200 and still maintain a high-quality negative.

FP4 PLUS FIELD TESTS

Before venturing out on any major shooting expedition with a new film, we shoot one test roll near the lab and

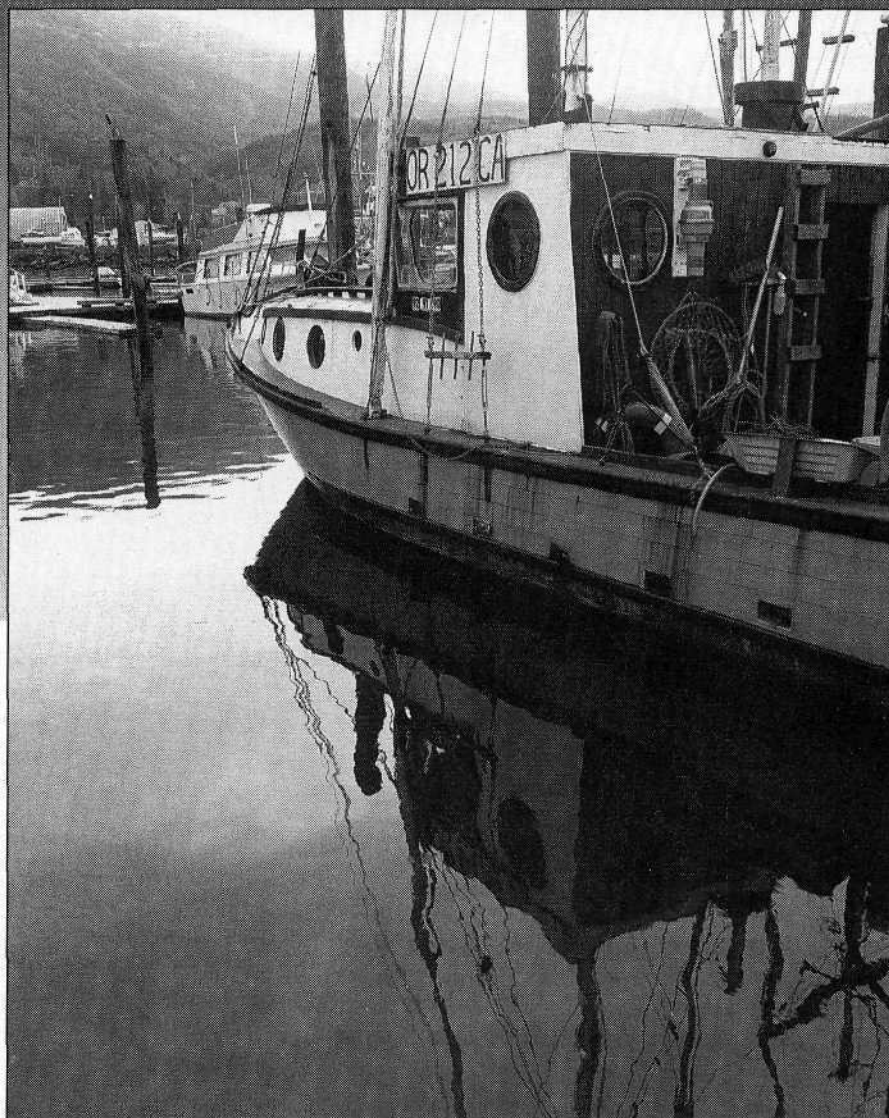
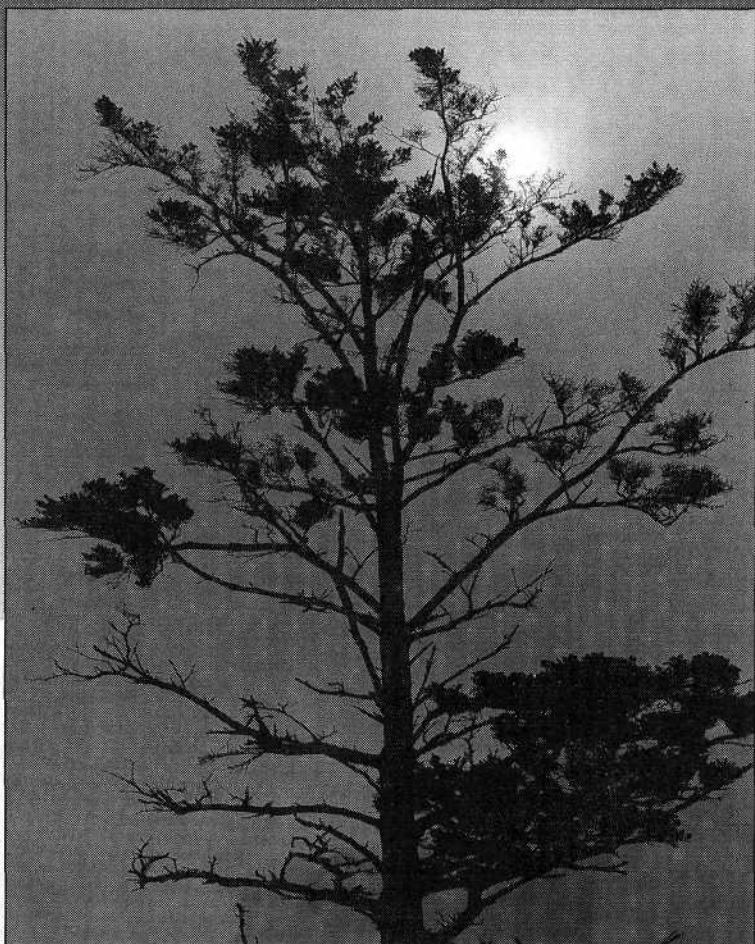


process it in the developer we plan on using. The results will tell us if we need to make any adjustments to our camera system, meter, and lenses. When we looked at the processing chart, we couldn't believe the processing time. At first, we thought it was a mistake. The normal processing time was half what we were used to with other black-and-white films. We were even more surprised at the quality of the image from our first test negative. The grain was very fine, the tonal range was incredible, and the sharpness far exceeded our

expectations.

Now we were really excited about recording what we saw in the subtle shades of black and white. We grabbed all the FP4 Plus film we had, and set off on a very enjoyable photo expedition. As we moved from one location to the next, we realized that areas where we had concentrated on vivid colors before produced a whole new world of dazzling images. It was all coming back to us. We were having great fun, and we were getting paid to do it!

We selected a variety of subjects with low contrast, high contrast, low light, and extreme light. We exposed these subjects at exposure levels ranging from 4 stops over to 2 stops under. As we approached the end of the day, the lighting became very flat, with gray



ations, Ilford has even set up time-and-temperature charts for those rolls accidentally exposed at ISO settings less than 50. In this case, Ilford recommends using its Perceptol developer.

We divided the film into three processing runs, and hand-processed the first two rolls at 68° F for 5½ minutes, with gentle agitation. The second group was

machine-processed for 4½ minutes with vigorous agitation, and the third group was pushed one stop, with a 6-minute developing time.

After processing all of our exposed film, we laid the finished rolls out on the light box and took a loupe to the first roll. The base density was very clean and free of processing marks. As we moved the loupe around we noted that the base was completely void of any type of camera or processing scratch. That told us that the film had a very tough emulsion, and could take considerable darkroom abuse.

We selected the best-looking 645 negative, placed it in the enlarger, removed all the filtration, and made our first print. The tonal range was outstanding, the sharpness was beyond our

expectations, and this was without any filtration or special processing. After printing several of the normal negatives, we decided to try some of the pushed negatives, and found that they had a slight increase in grain and contrast. The grain was more than acceptable, and contrast was controlled by adding filtration (we used variable-contrast paper).

We saved the red-filter negatives for last, and were not surprised at the rich image quality that came from the silhouettes taken in lousy lighting conditions. As we went from one negative to the next, we wondered, "If we can get this kind of high quality from a 645 negative, just think what the giant enlargements would look like from 6x9—or sheet-film—negatives!" FP4 Plus definitely puts the zing back into black-and-white photography.

CONCLUSION

Both of us have been involved in photography for more than 25 years. We like to relish the feeling of awe that we experienced when we took our first black-and-white picture, muddled through processing the film, and marveled as the print magically appeared in the developing tray. It is time for us all to feel the newness of photography again, and Ilford's FP4 Plus 120 film makes it all possible.

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skies, so we tried several shots through a red No. 25 filter, rating the film at EI 25. We ran out of film long before we ran out of subjects, so we reluctantly returned to the lab.

LAB RESULTS

FP4 Plus can be processed in a variety of Ilford developers, including Universal, Ilfotec HC, ID-11 Plus, Microphen, Perceptol, and Type II professional developer. Ilford also recognizes the fact that photographers may choose FP4 Plus film, but may choose another manufacturer's developer. So Ilford also provides time-and-temperature charts for D-76, Microdol-X, HC-110, T-Max, Acufine, and Rodinal developers, for film speeds of 50, 125, and 200.

In an effort to cover all exposure situ-