



Photo opportunity

Make something more of your holiday snaps — it's easy. Ken McMahon shows you how.

So, you're back from your annual jaunt to Alicante having paid a small fortune for photo processing — or maybe you've been really smart and spent loads of money on a digital camera? If so, you'll be wondering whether you can do anything more imaginative with your snaps than merely replace your Star Wars screensaver.

Well it's montage time. Find a photo that includes the whole holiday party: you remember, the one you took on the last day having made three abortive attempts with the self-timer before asking that German bloke to take one for you.

Next, forget about cutting yourselves out and replacing the background with pictures of places you *haven't* been, or swirly seventies disco backgrounds, or the Rovers Return. We're going to draw a cartoon background. Can't draw? Don't worry. If, like me, you find 'stick people' a challenge, this is right up your street.

Before we start, a quick word about mice: they are bad, bad drawing tools. If you intend to do much drawing on your PC, buy a graphics tablet with a pressure-sensitive stylus. If you're stuck with the rodent and it's more than a couple of months old, take the ball out and scrape the accumulated muck off its rollers. Make sure your mat is on a flat surface and it'll be a less frustrating experience.

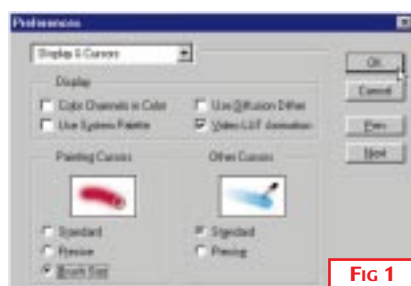


FIG 1

➔ **First, do a quick pencil sketch** of your scene. You can do this using a pencil and paper, and then scan it in, or use the painting tools. These are the airbrush, paintbrush, rubber stamp, line and pencil

tools. You could also include the paintbucket, eye dropper, eraser and gradient tools. For my line drawing I've stuck to the paintbrush and pencil tools.

You can do the line drawing in black. If the foreground swatch is not already black, click 'show swatches' and choose black from the Photoshop default palette. Choose 'reset palette' from the palette menu if the default version is not displayed. Another thing worth doing at this stage is to select file/preferences/display and cursors, and check the brush size button [Fig 1]. The cursor will now show you the exact size of brush you are using with the hot spot in the middle — the bit the paint comes out of — which is much more useful than the default tool cursor.

I've chosen a desert scene [Fig 2] which, as it happens, is not all that different from the reality of our own holiday this year and it certainly beats a rainy fortnight in Cumbria! Don't worry too much if the mouse occasionally goes off on its own; CTRL-Z will undo any major mishaps and you can use the history palette to review and delete unwanted steps.

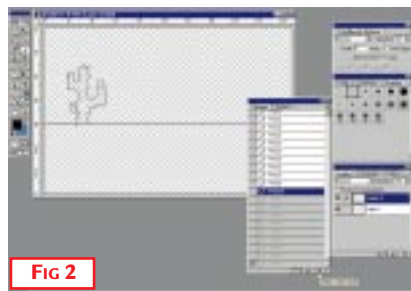


FIG 2

➔ **I've created a new layer** for each element of the drawing [Fig 3]. Later, I'll want to duplicate the cactus, so having it on its own layer will make this easier. Also, I might want to edit any of the other elements so this is really just a precaution. Technically, the most difficult part of this scene was the sun. I didn't want to use the ellipse tool because I wanted a slightly irregular sun. After about 20 or so attempts to draw a reasonable looking circle with the mouse, — yes, I really did try that many times! — I gave up and used the ellipse tool, holding down the shift key to draw a perfect circle. I then stroked the circle selection

with a three-pixel path and finally applied the wave distort filter with 1 generator, max and min settings of 10, 15 for wavelength, with 2 and 4 for amplitude.



FIG 3

➔ **Colouring time!** First select everything below the horizon line using the magic wand tool. Don't forget to make sure you're in the right layer; just click in the layers palette. This will only work if your horizon line is unbroken, otherwise the selection will 'leak'. I couldn't find a suitably sandy colour in the swatches so I clicked on the foreground colour swatch and chose one from the colour picker. By clicking in the empty space below the swatches you can add the current foreground colour to the swatches palette.

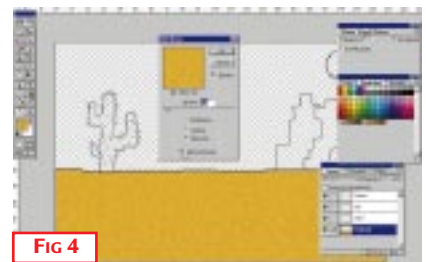


FIG 4

➔ **Select fill** from the edit menu and click OK using the default settings. Add some graininess to the sand using the 'add noise' filter [Fig 4]: either uniform or Gaussian noise in monochromatic mode makes good sand but beware of going overboard with it or you'll end up with what looks more like fibreboard.

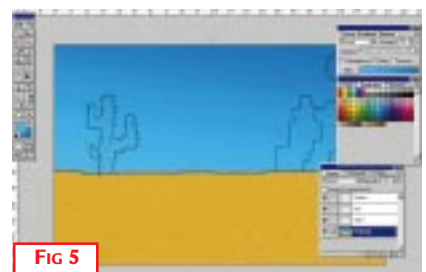


FIG 5

➤ **Now for the sky.** First you need a light and dark sky blue. There are two perfect swatches right in the middle of the palette. Click on the light one to select it as the foreground colour, then ALT click on the dark one to select it as the background colour.

Select the area above the horizon again using the magic wand tool and then click on the gradient tool [Fig 5]. If the tool options palette isn't visible, select window/show options and you'll see the default settings for a foreground-to-background linear gradient, which is exactly what we want. Click and drag from the horizon to the top of the window — go slightly diagonally for a more realistic effect — to create a perfect summer holiday sky.

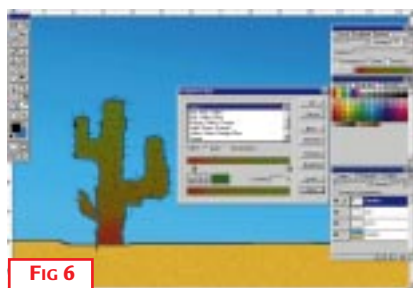


FIG 6

➤ **We'll also use a gradient** to colour the cactus [Fig 6]. Providing your cactus doesn't have any holes in its outline you can select it with the magic wand. Select the gradient tool and click the edit button in the gradient palette. Choose one of the two colour gradients from the pull-down list, such as red/green or violet/orange. Click on the start point (its tip will turn black to show it's selected) and choose dark brown. Click the endpoint and choose a cactus green. Drag the mid-point marker so there's about 20 percent brown to 80 percent green, rename the gradient cactus and click OK before applying it to the cactus selection.



FIG 7

➤ **Time for some real painting** now. Select the paintbrush tool and a reasonably-sized brush and paint the rocky outcrop [Fig 7]. Check the wet edges box before you start. This produces

a semi-transparent effect, building up colour at the brush edges to give a watercolour style to the brush strokes. I've gone for a horizontal stroke to emphasise the stratiform nature of the rock and... erm... because the mouse wouldn't go any other way!



FIG 8

➤ **Another gradient** coming up; this time for the sun [Fig 8]. Making sure you are in the sun layer, select the inside of the sun using the magic wand. Select the orange-yellow-orange gradient from the pull-down menu, click on the gradient tool and hold until the flyout appears. Select the second tool along; which is the radial gradient tool, and drag it from the centre to the outside of the sun.

➤ **Press CTRL-D** to deselect all and click the paintbrush tool. In the tool options palette, select a fade value of 15 and fade to transparent. Hold down the ALT key and use the eyedropper to select the deepest orange from the centre or edge of the sun and then draw in the sun's rays by clicking and dragging away from the sun.

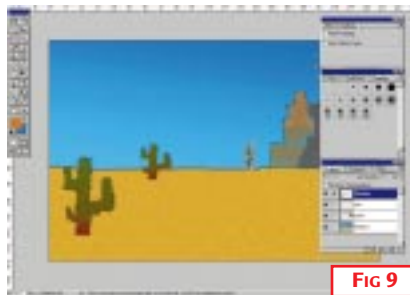


FIG 9

➤ **Just to create** a little more detail we're going to duplicate the cactus [Fig 9]. Click on the cactus layer in the layers palette and press CTRL-A to select all. Then click and drag the cactus, to float and position it. Next, hold down the ALT key and pick it up again to make a copy and reposition the copy further 'back' towards the horizon. Press CTRL-T to free transform and drag a corner handle to resize the cactus. You can stretch or squeeze it at the same time, to make it taller or squatter.



FIG 10

➤ **Finally, it's time** for that holiday snap [Fig 10]. Draw a path around your subject using the pen tool, not forgetting the gaps between arms and legs. Don't worry if it's not quite right to begin with, you can edit it later. Select 'make selection' from the paths palette menu and, in the dialogue box, select a feather radius of one pixel to soften the edges slightly. Click in the cartoon window and create a new layer, then using the move tool, drag and drop your cut-out people onto the cartoon background. Depending on the relative sizes and resolutions of each image, you may need to scale the people to get the proportion right.



FIG 11

➤ **Now you are just about there** [Fig 11]. I have added some clouds by using the airbrush and text, which I have rendered and softened using the Gaussian blur filter, to make it look a bit like sky-writing. Alternatively you can get quick, excellent results using the layer effects.

There only remains the question of what to do with your creation. You could replace your old screensaver but more interesting options include T-shirts, a holiday video cover — or if you are adventurous, opening titles — or you could make an interesting title page for your photo album.

PCW CONTACTS

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