

iPhone 11 Pro has an unlikely rival in this 7-year-old phone

The Nokia Lumia 1020 was the photography champ of its day. Seven years on, how does it compare to today's top shooter?

The iPhone 11 Pro has one of the best camera setups found on any of today's top-end phones. It can take photos that can give DSLRs a run for their money and can keep on shooting well when the light goes down. But how far has this technology really come in recent years?

To find out, I put the iPhone up against the Nokia Lumia 1020. Released all the way back in 2013, the Lumia 1020 was in its day the ultimate example of mobile imaging prowess. Its 41-megapixel maximum resolution was a first and its wealth of features meant it was well-suited to photographers who didn't want to carry around a compact camera all day.



"In the 1020, Nokia pushes the smartphone camera envelope with a combination of raw image-capturing prowess and close-cropping capability that makes it one of the most artistically able smartphone cameras we've tested." Jessica Dolcourt explained in CNET's review of the phone.

This piece isn't designed to form any kind of buying advice -- nobody should be trying to work out whether to buy a new iPhone or a 7-year-old phone running an obsolete operating system. If you are, you should really read why using an outdated phone can be a serious security risk. But I did think it would be interesting to see how two top-tier shooters of their times compare and see just how far phone cameras have come.

All images were taken in the standard, automatic camera modes. They're all in JPEG format, unless otherwise noted. By default, the Nokia Lumia takes 5-megapixel JPEG shots, which is what we'll see throughout this piece, unless otherwise noted.





First up, this sunny view in Edinburgh's Dean Village. Already I'm impressed with the Lumia 1020: It's achieved a great overall exposure, with controlled highlights in the sky and plenty of shadow detail. I knew this sort of scene wouldn't be a challenge for the iPhone, with its automatic HDR mode, but I didn't expect the Lumia to get so close. Sure, the iPhone's shot has more shadow detail and more punchy, vibrant colors, but I like the more natural look that the Lumia has achieved here.





Cropping into that image to 200% does reveal some more noticeable differences though. The Lumia's shot lacks detail, with some of the fine brickwork looking mushy. The Lumia's JPEG is only 5 megapixels, so I opened the raw DNG file in Photoshop and added some sharpening, which the iPhone automatically applies.



Cropping in on the same area, it's clear that it hasn't made much difference.





Again, I'm impressed with how well the Lumia 1020 has captured this scene on Edinburgh's North coast. The overall exposure is spot on, with well-preserved highlights and shadows. The white balance is decent too, and there's a good amount of detail when zoomed in. Sure, the iPhone's shot is a touch brighter, with more shadow details, but it's a close competition.



Working from the Lumia's DNG raw file, I made only a few tweaks in Lightroom to lift the shadows and adjust the color balance to create this final image. I don't think anybody would be able to guess that this shot was taken on a phone made in 2013.





I found these shells on the beach further up the coast. The iPhone's shot is crisper, but otherwise there's little difference between the shots.



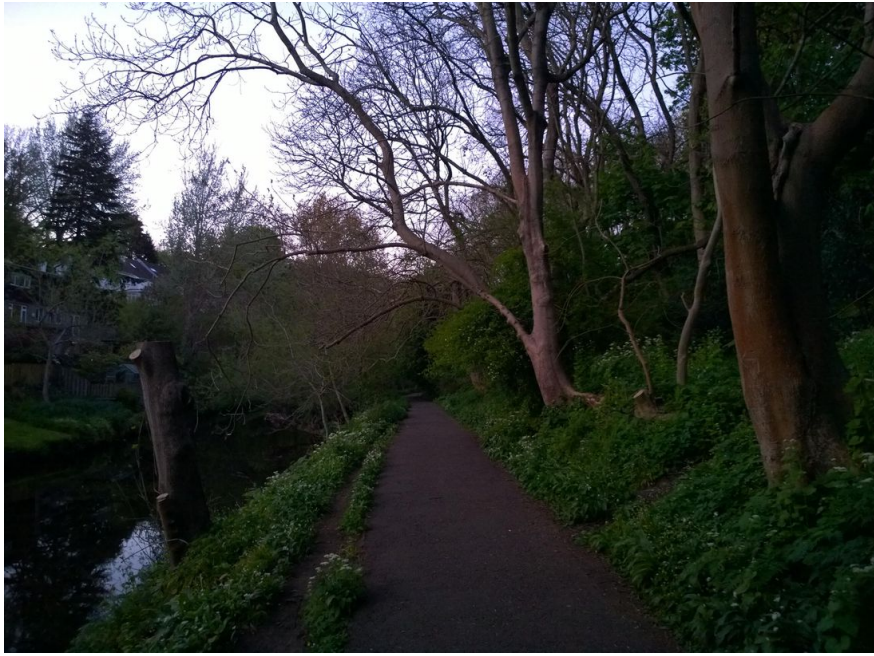
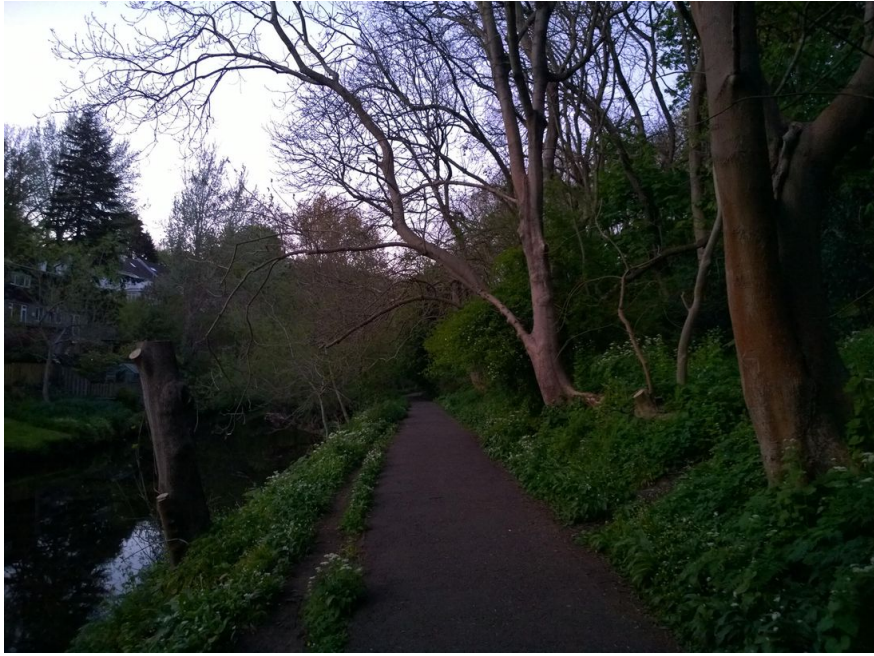


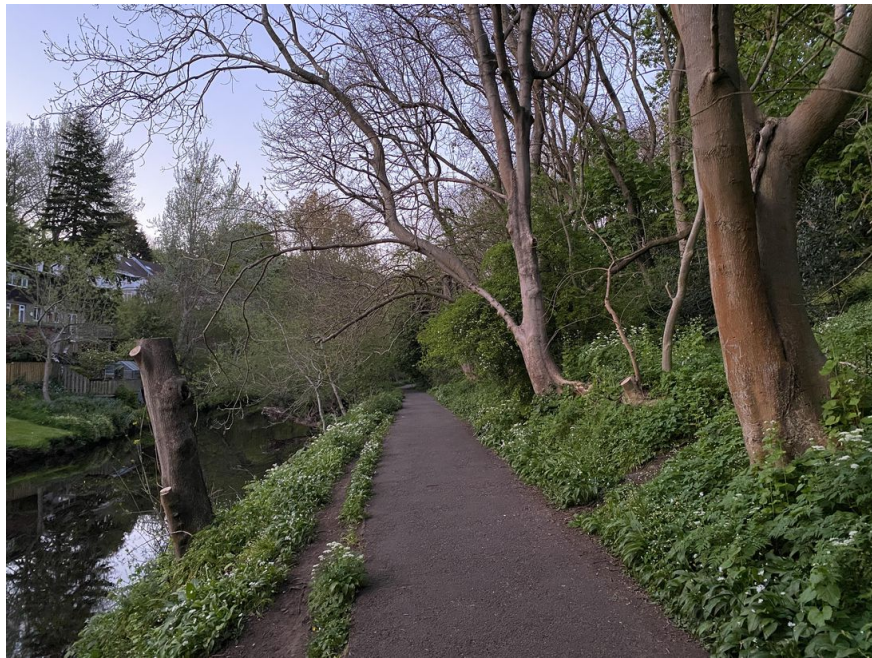
The difference between the two phones is much more noticeable here. The iPhone's shot is brighter, with crisper details on the painted words and the tree bark.





The difference is clear in this example too; the iPhone's shot has better-looking exposure, contrast and overall detail.





The iPhone 11 Pro really starts to pull away in low light. The iPhone's version of this riverside scene is brighter, with significantly more details on the trees and leaves.





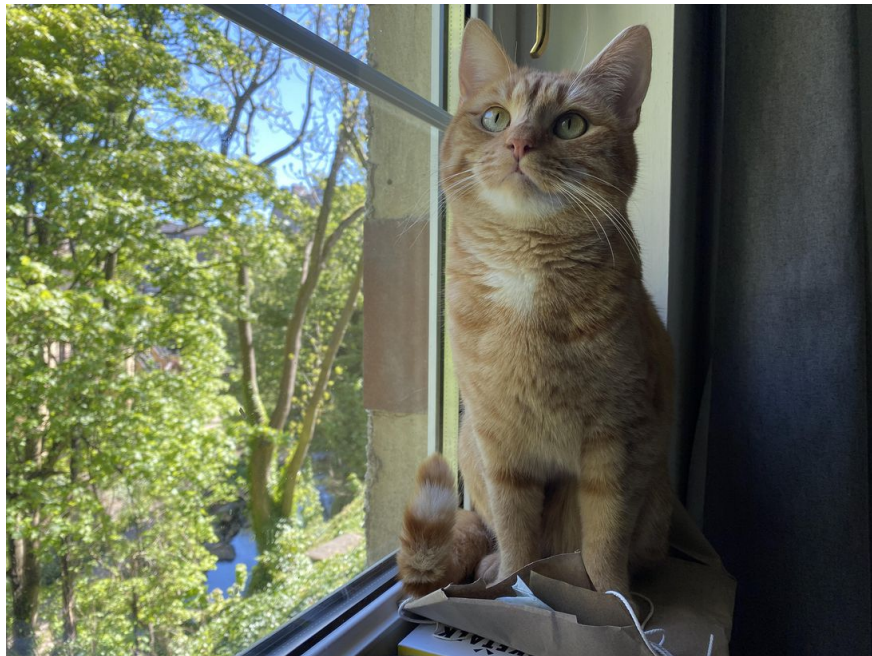
The story is much the same here. The Lumia 1020's shot is darker, with a lot of the fine details completely lost.





Cropping in close, there's a vast difference in brightness and detail.





Back indoors, I had to take a snap of my wonderful ginger boy Toulouse, who was happy to pose for the camera. Again, the Lumia 1020 has struggled to achieve an even exposure, losing detail in the highlights outside and a lot of deep shadows inside. The color balance is off too, giving a green tinge to beautiful Toulouse. The iPhone's shot is brighter, with accurate colors.

What have we learned?

It's no surprise that the iPhone 11 Pro takes the better images -- I didn't expect for a second that the conclusion would be anything else. But I am impressed at just how close the Lumia 1020 came in some of the shots. It takes

its best images, like all cameras, in good light. And in some of the coastal scenes, the Lumia offers decent competition to many of today's phones. It handles exposure well and while it doesn't have an HDR mode, it's possible to pull back some highlight and shadow detail by editing the raw DNG file.

The Lumia's low-light skills don't compare as favorably, however. Again, that's no surprise, particularly as night-time shooting has been a focus of most of today's flagship phones for some time. The iPhone 11 Pro, OnePlus 8, Pixel 4 and Samsung Galaxy S20 all have dedicated night modes that can take excellent images in low light.

It's clear to see then where the imaging advancements have been made in recent years. That said, if there's going to be any kind of take-away from this exercise, it's that you don't need to have the absolute latest, best hardware in order to take good images. And while that doesn't mean going and buying a 7-year-old phone, it could make you consider whether you really need to upgrade from your 2017 iPhone X for the better camera, or whether you could still squeeze some life out of it yet.

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