

BENBO TREKKER 35

The Tripod that Never Stays Home Alone

by Jack and Sue Drafahl

PHOTOGRAPHIC'S USER REPORT

When photographers plan an outdoor photo expedition, they must consider the bulk and weight of the equipment they intend to use. One item of concern is the trusty tripod. In many cases, it's so big and heavy that it often gets left at home. With some of the newer, lightweight tripods on the market today, however, photographers can make a tripod their constant travel companion. The Benbo Trekker 35 is ideal for the hiking or backpacking photographer.

TREKKER CONSTRUCTION

Like all tripods, the Trekker is three-legged, but that's where the similarity ends. Each leg is identical, approximately 24 inches long when compressed. Extending the outer shell on each leg adds an additional 24 inches to the tripod's height. When the center column is extended, the 4½-pound Trekker provides a maximum height of 64 inches. Since the outer leg shell is at the bottom, the tripod can be immersed up to the top of the lower-leg section in lakes, rivers, surf, snow, or any other wet environment. Just wipe the leg dry, and there'll be no risk of corrosion or water damage.

The Trekker's legs lock into the extended position via large, heavy-duty knurled knobs that can be rotated 360° around the inner shell—very useful for situations in which the tripod is up against a tree or a rock, and a fixed locking knob can get in the way. With the Trekker, you merely rotate the knob to the inside of the tripod, and lock it down. These oversized leg-lock knobs are easy to tight-

en, even when the weather demands the use of gloves.

The secret of the Trekker is how the three legs join at the top of the unit. The top end of each leg expands into a circular disk that is sandwiched with the disks of the other legs. Special pie-shaped wedges, located between each leg joint, allow for 360° independent movement of each leg. The three legs and the two wedges are held together with the tripod's namesake—a bent-bolt, ergo, Benbo. It's this arrangement of bent bolt and wedges that makes this tripod unique.

The Trekker's center shaft is attached

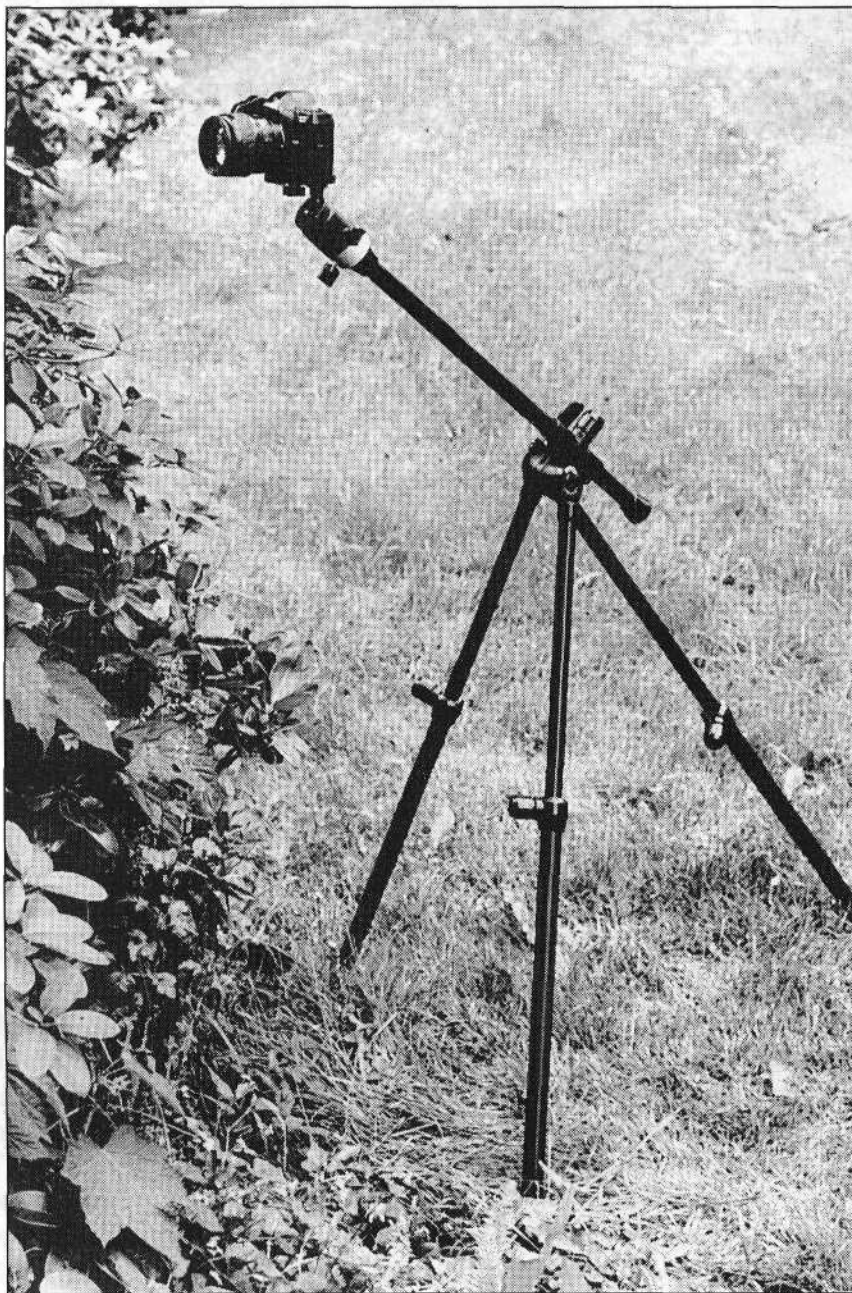
to the legs via a metal block that's also sandwiched between the legs and the wedges. There's a tripod-socket bolt at each end of this 24-inch-long section, so the tripod head can be mounted in the normal or the inverted position. The legs and center shaft are all locked into place with a handle that attaches to one end of the bent bolt. When the legs and center shaft are in place, you merely turn the handle clockwise until all moving parts are firmly locked.

USING THE BENBO

It takes a little time to learn how to use a Benbo, because its configuration is so different from that of conventional tripods. You should practice setting it up before trying to take advantage of all its possibilities.

First, extend the legs to full length, and lock them with the knurled knobs. Release the legs and center shaft by turning the bent-bolt handle counterclockwise. Place the legs in the standard position and straighten the center shaft. Turn the bent-bolt handle clockwise until there is slight resistance. Make final adjustments to the legs and center shaft, then fully tighten the handle. You can change the height of the camera by raising or lowering the center shaft, or by extending or compressing the legs.

Once you have mastered the standard position, it's time to have fun with all the other possible Trekker positions. Mount your camera on the bottom of the center shaft, and loosen the bent-bolt handle. Move the legs and center shaft until you have the camera precisely



A curious object, and a very versatile tripod: the Benbo Trekker 35.

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sun to set behind the cacti.

While waiting, we poked and prodded the tripod to see just how sturdy it was in this configuration. The Trekker held as firmly as some tripods twice its size and weight. For even greater stability, we found that we could suspend a rock from the base of the center column, using a rope or strap.

On the following day, we took a hike to the top of the bluff overlooking the bay. We had only a small day pack with us, but found the Trekker so small and light that we could attach it to the back of the pack without any

trouble. Once we made it to the top, we set the Trekker up in a normal configuration for some panoramic shots of the harbor, using the grid focusing screen to keep the horizon line level.

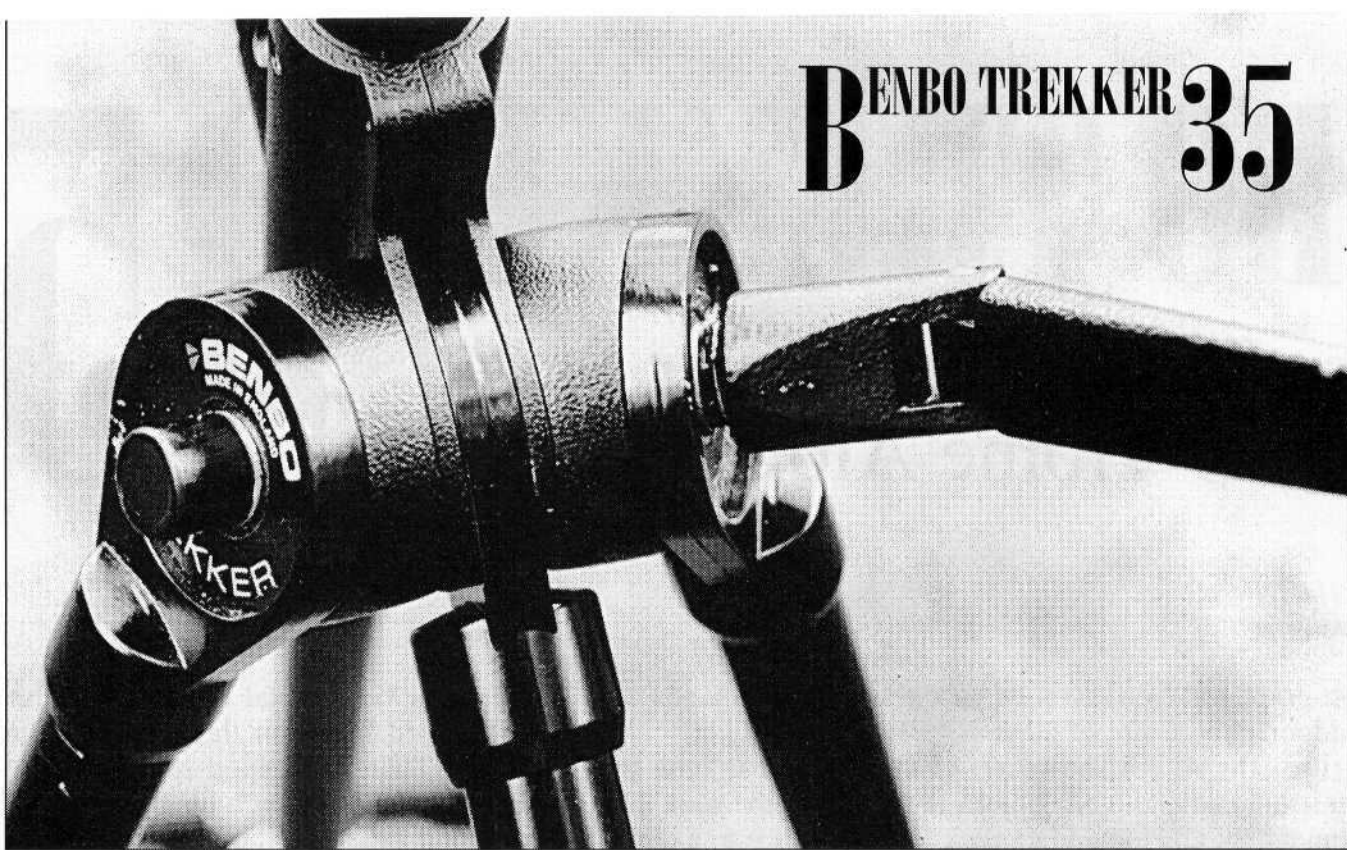
After several bracketed exposures of this spectacular view, we switched from wide-angle to macro, and reversed the center column to place the camera and macro lens under the tripod. The location was full of large rocks, but the Trekker nestled right into them with the agility of a mountain goat, and became a very stable platform for low-angle macrophotography.

Our final tests were conducted on our return to Portland, where we went out of our way to find difficult situations. In other words, we looked for potential tripod trouble. We located some small flowers and fungi on an old willow tree, a situation that would not accommodate a standard tripod setup. We released the tension in the bent-bolt handle, and moved one Trekker leg into a horizontal position against the tree. We then moved the center column into position and spread the other legs for stability. With this contorted configuration, the Trekker took up just a two-inch-wide space on the ground. We locked the tripod in position, and made our shots.

CONCLUSIONS

As outdoor photographers, we are constantly looking for things to improve upon the way we take pictures, as well as the quality of the pictures themselves. We found the Benbo Trekker 35 to be an excellent tool. It provided agility, and stability, for any endeavor. It's light and compact, making it one of the best tripods in the industry.

The Trekker 35 lists for \$179.95, and is distributed by the Saunders Group, 21 Jet View Dr., Rochester, NY 14624; (716) 328-7800. □



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1. The Benbo's secret is the bent bolt that holds it all together, and allows it to assume positions alien to other tripods.

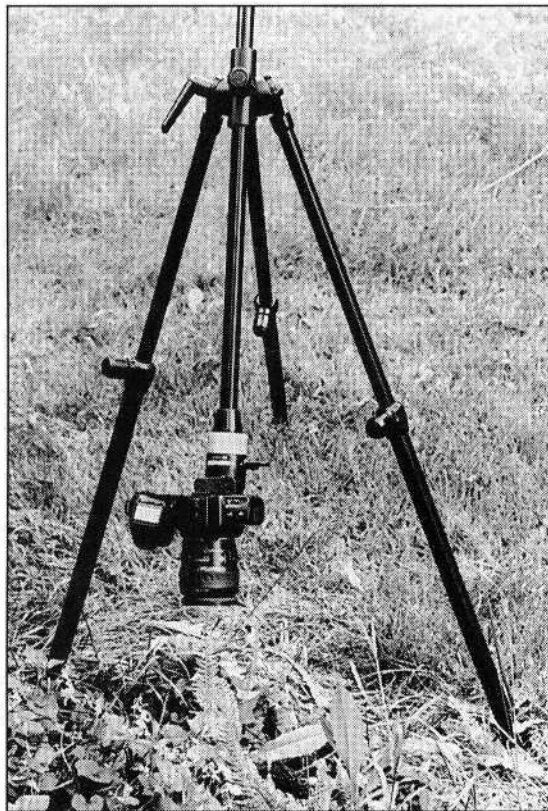
2. The Trekker 35 also functions as a conventional tripod on unconventional terrain.

3 Low-angle shots are very easily made with the Trekker's swiveling center post.

positioned to capture those down-to-earth shots, and tighten the bent-bolt handle. This configuration provides steady support for macro situations in which the light level is low, and you don't want to use flash for illumination.

If your camera is already mounted on the top of the tripod, you can release the bent-bolt handle and swing the center shaft 180°. This movement will swivel the camera to the bottom of the center shaft, for those low-angle shots.

Try positioning the Trekker against a tree or even a wall in your home.



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Loosen the bent-bolt handle and move one tripod leg up to a horizontal position. Place this leg against the wall or tree, reposition the other two legs for stability, and relock the bent-bolt handle. Once you have mastered these three basic positions, you are ready to take the Trekker on a field trip.

FIELD TESTS

We field-tested the Benbo Trekker in Baja California and Portland, Oregon, with several types of 35mm cameras and lenses. Our first test was a Baja sunset hike off of the Brooks Institute of Photography research vessel *Just Love*. We set up the Trekker on a rocky plateau near some cacti. After releasing the bent-bolt handle, we found that the legs were very easy to position in cracks and crevices on the rocky surface. We straightened the center post, locked the tripod into position, and waited for the