

A Tripod for Between a Rock and a Hard Place

by Sue and Jack Drafahl

PHOTOGRAPHIC'S
**USER
REPORT**

We have been reviewing quite a few different pieces of equipment for PHOTOgraphic lately, from the latest innovation in cameras, to new and exciting tools and gadgets for the studio. But when the UPS man dropped off this thing called a "Benbo," we weren't quite sure just what we were getting into. It's a tripod, but it doesn't look like other tripods. This led us to theorize about just how this alien-looking piece of photographic equipment might have been developed.

If a company decided to build a new kind of tripod, they would locate experts in the fields of machining and physics, and instruct them to build a device capable of supporting a camera under every possible condition. If these design experts had no preconceived notion of what a camera tripod should look like, we think the end result might be a lot like this device called a Benbo tripod.

That may not have been exactly how the Benbo came to be, but if we could find the experts who designed and built it, we would like to shake their hands. Why such enthusiasm? As nature and outdoor photographers, we constantly find ourselves shooting in rugged terrain that makes it tough to use a tripod. The Benbo is designed for independent movement of all legs, allowing it to traverse any type of terrain. The watertight bottom sections of the Benbo are larger than the top sections, so the tripod may be placed in water with no worry of corrosion. Each bottom section is secured in place using a large knurled knob that even lumberjacks can easily use.

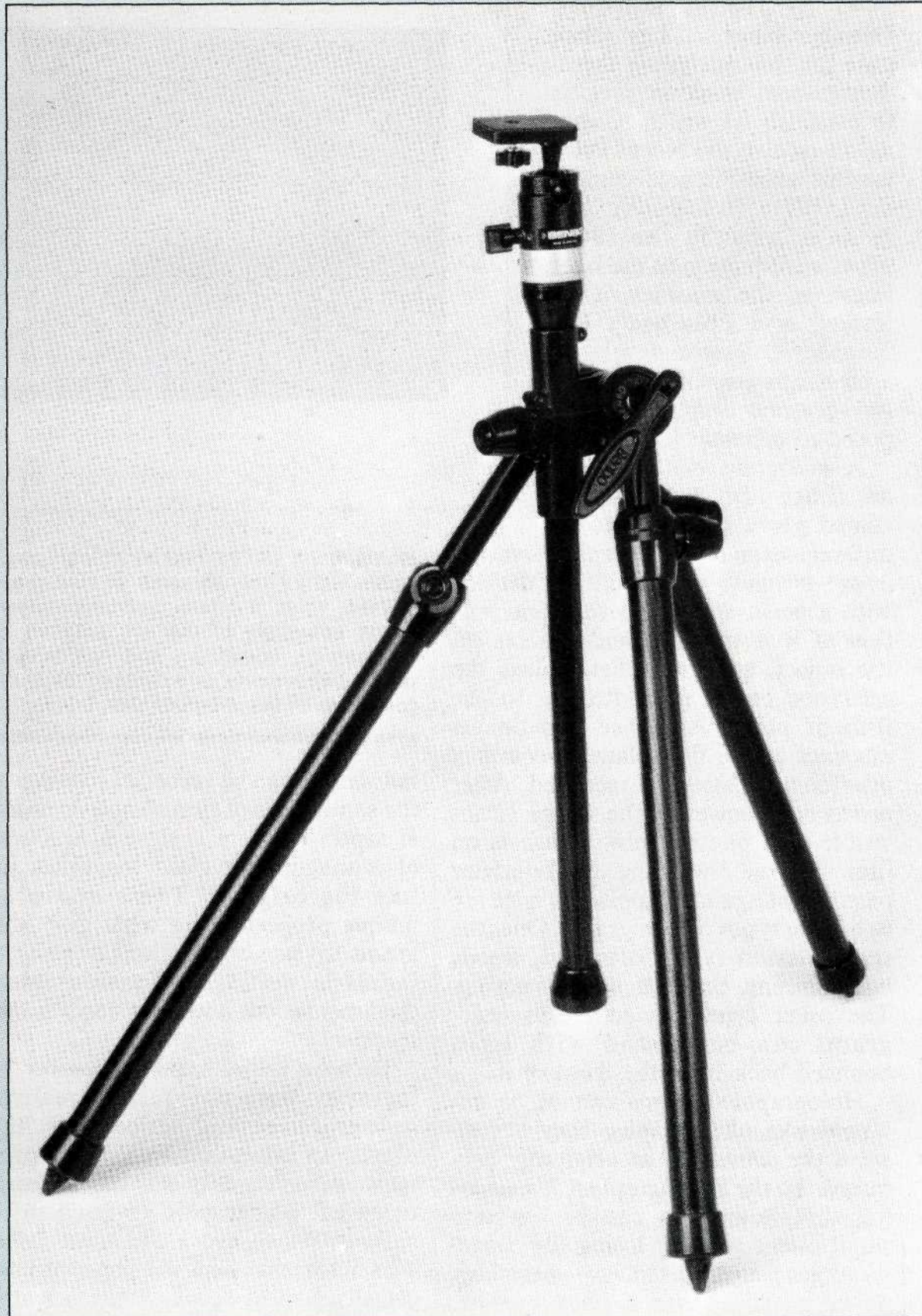
HOW IT WORKS

What is really unique about the Benbo is how the legs are attached to one another. The center-shaft bracket fits around the center leg, and these two pieces pivot in the same plane, up to 360°. The two outer legs are attached to pie-shaped spacers that allow them to move at angles of 0-180°, and then to the center leg (and center shaft), all with one large "bent bolt" (hence the name Benbo). In use,

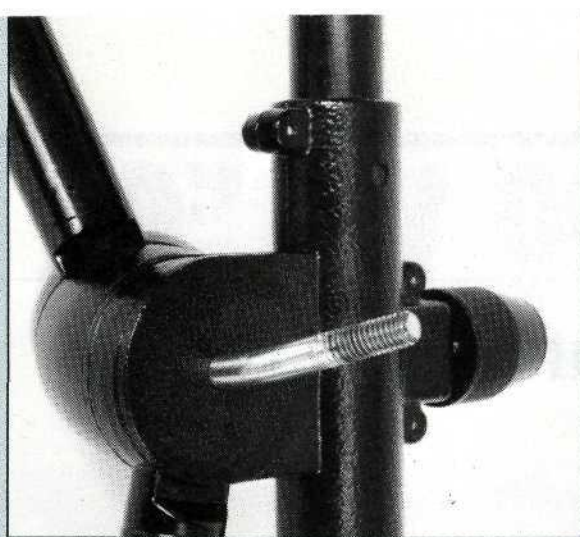
after each leg is positioned as desired, a large handle is turned until the bent bolt tightens down on all legs and spacers. The more pressure on this handle, the more sturdy the tripod.

One concern was how much pressure this handle and bent bolt could take. At over 100 foot-pounds of pressure we gave up. Once the bolt is tight-

ened, the center shaft can be slid from one end to the other to correct for height or distance, depending on how the tripod is configured. At each end you will find either European or U.S. threads for attaching the Benbo head. The head has two controls, one for 360° panning, and the other to operate a large, heavy-duty ball and socket.



The Benbo is a most versatile tripod.



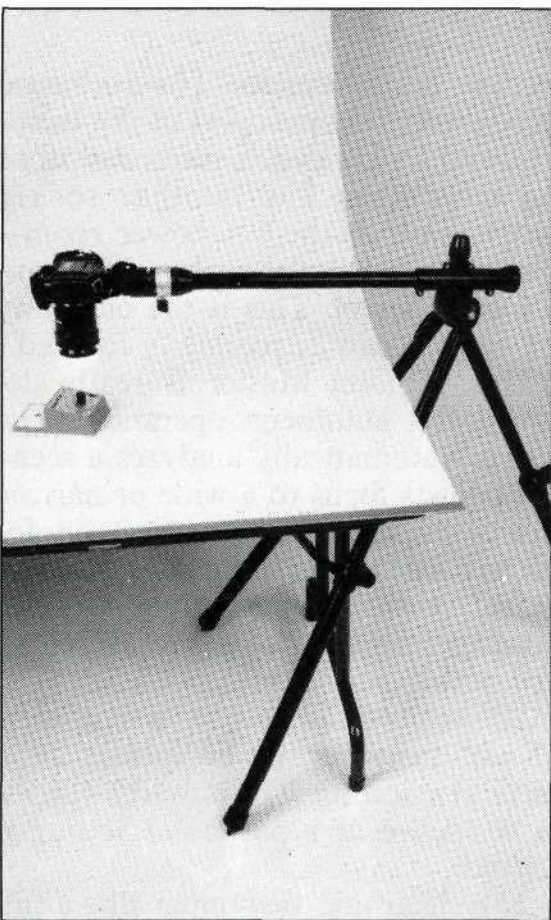
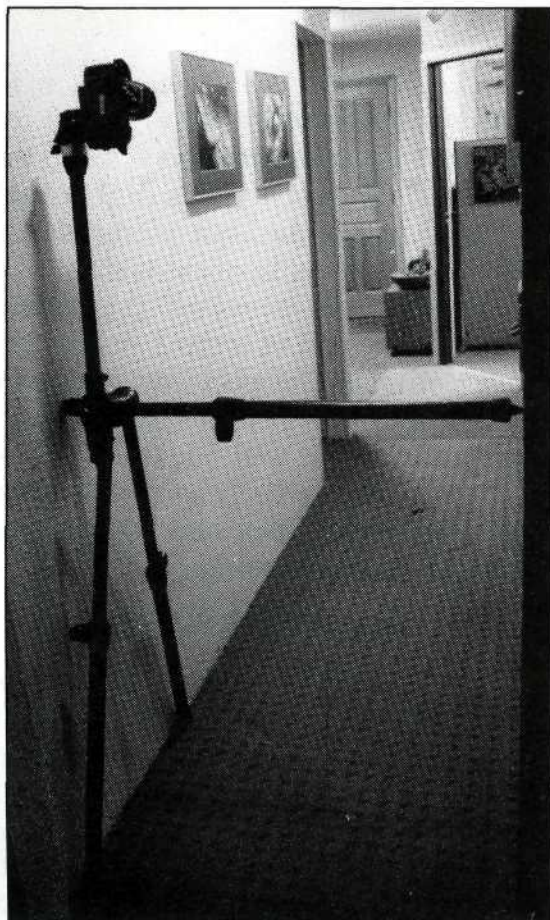
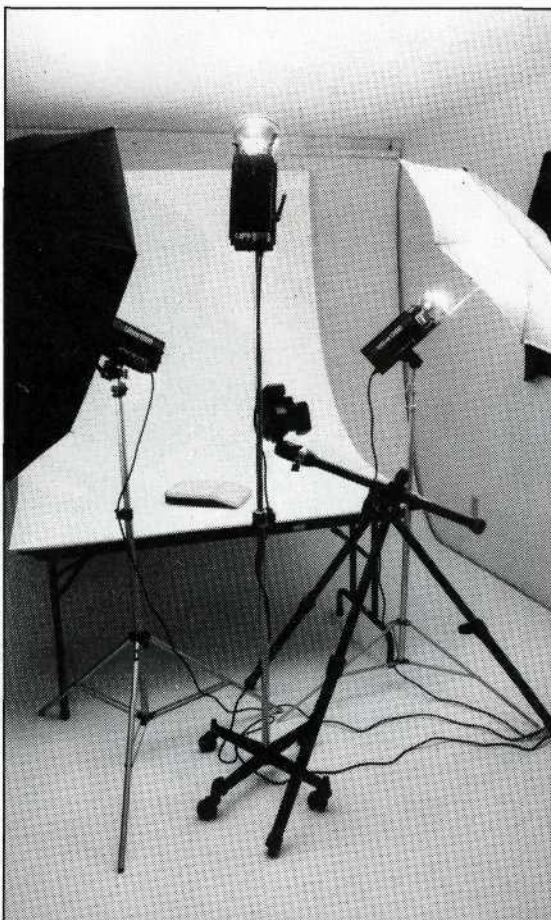
Here's the bent bolt, which gives the Benbo its name as well as its incredible versatility.

IN USE

At first, the Benbo is difficult to use, not because of its design, but because you're used to working with conventional tripods. The Benbo offers so much freedom when placing the tripod legs, you have to learn a whole new direction of thought. But after spending a few minutes getting used to it, you'll be out photographing low life, such as flowers and leaves. Next, you'll be extending the Benbo to its limit.

But the Benbo works well inside,

ALL PHOTOS BY AUTHORS



With a Benbo (shown is the Benbo 1 Standard model tested), you can firmly position your camera just about anywhere.

too. We found it to be extremely useful for shooting small objects on the copy stand, where oblique angles are necessary and not normally possible. When we shot some products in the studio and wanted to maintain the same perspective even when doing close-ups, the Benbo came to the rescue. By setting the Benbo at the edge of the shooting table, we could then extend the camera on the center shaft out over the table for that really close-up shot, without changing the lighting or moving the product.

SPECIFICATIONS

TRIPOD: Benbo 1 Standard

MAX. HEIGHT: 62 in.

LIST PRICE: \$289.95

TRIPOD: Benbo 2 XL

MAX. HEIGHT: 97 in.

LIST PRICE: \$319.95

TRIPOD: Benbo 3 Low-Boy

MAX. HEIGHT: 26 in.

LIST PRICE: \$229.95

TRIPOD: Benbo 4 Low-Boy EL

MAX. HEIGHT: 45 in.

LIST PRICE: \$264.95

TRIPOD: Benbo 5 Giant XL

MAX. HEIGHT: 99 in.

LIST PRICE: \$699.95

TRIPOD: Benbo 6 Giant

MAX. HEIGHT: 80 in.

LIST PRICE: \$629.95

DISTRIBUTOR: The Saunders Group, 21 Jet View Dr., Rochester, NY 14624

When shooting outdoors in areas with extreme angles, just have the Benbo lift one leg and lean against whatever is convenient: trees, rocks, cars, etc. If you have to extend over a rock, a wall, or a large fallen tree, simply hang your camera bag on the back of the center shaft to counterbalance the weight of the extended camera.

Accessories for the Benbo tripod include several types of ball-and-socket heads, camera plates, 90° angle heads, and pan-and-tilt heads. There are four different versions of the standard Benbo tripod, varying in size and extension capability. Benbo tripods are made by Paterson and distributed by The Saunders Group, 21 Jet View Dr., Rochester, NY 14624; (716) 328-7800.

Also offered are two versions of the professional tripod, which allow increased weight-carrying capability for large-format cameras, as well as three versions of the lightweight Benbo monopod.

We have to warn you: You may get a few strange looks from other photographers as you set up on your Benbo tripod. But as your camera hangs extended over a rare wild flower, carefully braced between a rock and a hard place, just smile knowing that you got the shot—you and your Benbo! ■