



Evaluating Tripods & Tripod Heads for Nature Photography





Eduardo Sacayón (right) and Manuel Queme, at the entrance of the Chocon Machacas Natural Reserve for the Manatee

My name is Edgar Eduardo Sacayón and I am the technician at the FLAAR facilities in Guatemala, mainly I handle all the digital equipment, printers, scanners and digital cameras but I am also a Biology student.

I started getting involved in digital technology because of my interest in nature photography, and since here in Guatemala we have some of the most beautiful landscapes I took my first course on Digital Panoramic Photography with Dr. Nicholas Hellmuth at Francisco Marroquín University, a year later I started working as a teaching assistant for Dr. Nicholas Hellmuth and since then I've been working for FLAAR. I have gained a lot of experience in all the process of digital imaging, from capture, editing to printing in different media. Right now I am learning color management, and in the long run I would like to be one of the best digital nature photographers here in Guatemala.

As a biology student my main interest are in Landscape Ecology, because it is very hard for me to focus only on one group of



organisms, I like how they all interact and how does the landscape structure influence their relationships.

During March of 2005 we had a field trip to the Chocón Machacas Natural Reserve, its located at the banks of Lake Izabal



The only way inn to the Chocon Machacas Natural Reserve is a 1 hour ride in a boat. All the supplies have to be carried in by this means, even drinking water.



Invertebrate collecting method using nets.

near Livingston and it was established as an area of protection for the Manatee. It is mainly composed of Mangrove (various species of the genus *Rizophora*) and other emergent and submerged aquatic species of flora.

The purpose of the trip was to learn surveying methods for invertebrates, during three

days on which I took a Manfrotto Carbon tripod¹ and a Manfrotto tripodhead² on loan from FLAAR to write up this report.

I have been using this same tripod on several trips with different tripod heads, in order to see the differences between them, though the images that you see in this report are from one trip only, my comments



Invertebrates of the Chocón Machacas Natural Reserve as they were preserved for the Museum.

are from my experience using both tripod heads on different occasions.

The Manfrotto 490 ballhead is design for medium format and SLR cameras, I spent about 1 week in the field with this head and though it is quite good, you tend to lose quite an amount of time, every time you set the camera on the ball head, the reason is that first you have to loosen the ball lock, then screw the camera and finally tighten the ball lock again, and if you are a nature photographer some times you can't afford to lose any time, otherwise the subject can disappear, in this aspect the Green Grip Action head is more convenient because it has a quick release plate, which can be attached to the camera the whole time, allowing you to set your camera on

the tripod very quickly.

Another advantage of this tripod head is its grip; this makes the tripod head very easy to adjust but a little uncomfortable to use because you have to move the whole head, in this aspect the ball head is better, because the base is closer to the camera, this means that the angle of movement is narrower allowing to make adjustments in composition easier.

An ideal tripod head would be a combination of the two, a ball head with a grip. The quick release plate would be on the base of the ball head and the grip would stay fixed to the tripod head, allowing the ball head with the camera to move freely.



**Manfrotto carbon tripod and green action grip head. Chocon Machacas Natural Reserve
March 2005**

Now the carbon tripod is another story. I have no negative comments on the tripod, only positive ones, first of all it is light weight, and second every piece of it is design to work properly giving it stability it sounds like an ad but this is my truest and most honest opinion. Some months ago I bought a Meade Telescope, when I saw it on the internet I fell in love, mainly because what I saw on the pictures on the site, I am one of those persons that likes to have the best equipment possible, and because my area of interest is science and research from what it seemed Meade telescopes where made for pros, but once I took it home I realized that there where some defects on its fabrication, primarily because the ocular focusing pieces where made of plastic, reducing the quality of the movements on the telescope, this got me

really upset, I even thought It would be a good idea to write a report on it, perhaps in the future I will but what I am trying to say is that a good piece of equipment is one that has been manufactured taking in account every little detail, for example you may have notice that cheap tripods tend to wobble, this is because in order to make the product cheaper, companies that make them have to use cheap and poor quality material (screws, nuts, bolts, etc.) this expresses in a poor quality product.

It is not very hard to notice between a good piece of equipment and a bad one, some photographers that have seen my tripod have asked me where can they buy equipment like this, because of our location there aren't any specialized photographic stores in Guatemala, mainly because there



Lake Izabal, Chocón Machacas Natural Reserve. Guatemala

the center column to a horizontal position, this is very useful when you want your camera to face completely down without the legs interfering in the image; and fourth you can open the legs to a wider angle.

The 443 Carbon One series has been replaced by the Mag Fiber series, we have the 190MF3 in Ohio, I have worked with it a couple of times, when our director Dr. Nicholas Hellmuth brings it down to

is no demand, so the best answer I can give them is to buy it via the internet. I am really satisfied with my Manfrotto carbon fiber tripod, for the following reasons: first it is light weight, this means I can take it on long walks through the field, two it is really firm and it doesn't wobble, third it is very fast to set up (I really enjoy the fact that in order to extend the legs you only have to make one single movement to release them), three I can change the position of



Flora and Fauna of the Chocón Machacas Natural Reserve. Guatemala

Guatemala to make evaluations on the equipment, and for what I've seen it has some improvements, push buttons to open the legs and accessories like a detachable carrying handle.

You can check out all the Manfrotto line of equipment at:

<http://www.bogenimaging.us/>

Acknowledgments

The tripods and tripod heads were provided courtesy of Bogen Imaging.

www.bogenimaging.com

The Nikkormat camera and lenses were donated by FLAAR to be used in ecological research projects here in Guatemala.

Note:

FLAAR is a university-based research institute dedicated to the achievements of the diverse cultures of Latin America. To be practical in how much of this huge land mass we can realistically cover, we focus on Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Costa Rica. These are the countries that today occupy the areas that comprised pre-Columbian Mesoamerica from 2000 BC to the time of the Spanish Conquest.

The achievements in art, architecture, astronomy, and hieroglyphic writing of the ancient civilizations of these countries are in continual need of being adequately recorded for



Swallows on the pier. Chocón Machacas Natural Reserve, Guatemala.

posterity. So for decades FLAAR has dedicated its resources to improving the quality and quantity of photographic recording of these aspects of Latin America. FLAAR is known best for its photo archive of 50,000 images of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica as well as the tropical flora and fauna of this part of tropical Latin America. As we continue to photograph we very much appreciate it when companies such as Bogen Imaging provide high quality photography equipment.

Once the images exist, either digitally or in negatives, the next step is to learn what printing technology is best to facilitate making these images available to students, scholars, and the interested general public. This need, unfulfilled by any other organization, institute or university, has led FLAAR to make the concerted

effort to undertake research on the leading technologies of digital printing: laser (toner), laser light (RGB light, such as LightJet or Lambda), inkjet, thermal dye transfer, and variable data digital presses.

Since the many capable scholars and students who work on and in Latin America do not on their own have access to digital imaging technology, FLAAR provides crucial information. FLAAR has evolved an intelligent combination of digital imaging savvy combined with an ability to serve as an internationally respected center for public education by means of courses and publications in PDF format on the Internet.



Mosses of the Chocón Machacas Natural Reserve

(Footnotes)

¹ Manfrotto Carbon one 441 (Model 3443)

² Manfrotto 3562G Green Grip Action Ballhead w/quick release plate



River near by the Chocón Machacas Natural Reserve. Guatemala

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