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PROFESSIONAL MEMBER
Photos Courtesy of Author

ACCURATE HUNTER

TAKE A SEAT

Field shooting is rarely done on a level, manicured range—and probably not often on a freshly mowed golf course. If you can lie prone to shoot, you probably should. However, all too often you have to get high enough to shoot over low brush or terrain roll. Over the years I've found the sitting position one of the most useful, and with practice, almost as steady as prone.

There are two primary ways to assume an unsupported sitting position: cross-legged and bent-knee. Cross-legged sitting is the true, formal-target sitting position. Cross your legs, and sit with your shooting-side leg inside, supporting-side leg outside, and your body at about a 45-degree angle to the rifle-target line (left for lefties, right for righties). Shouldering the rifle, you bend forward at the waist as far as possible, trying to get your elbows over your knees, not directly on top of them.

This is not an especially easy or comfortable position to assume. You have to be limber and not too overweight, but with practice it's extremely steady. The bent-knee sitting position is sort of a hasty version: Legs apart, knees bent, feet flat to the ground, elbows over the knees, with about the same 45-degree angle off the rifle-target line. You don't have to be nearly as limber, and while the cross-legged position is very low, the bent-knee position gets you a bit higher. The obvious tradeoff is that it isn't nearly as steady, but both versions are significantly enhanced by wrapping your supporting arm into a hasty sling.



Boddington used a stout sagebrush to rest the rifle and his upended backpack for an elbow rest to take this Wyoming mule deer.



The bent-knee sitting position isn't as steady as cross-legged, but it's quicker and easier to drop into and gets you a bit higher. The big secret is the same: Get your elbows as far over your knees as possible to prevent slipping.

Getting the elbows far enough forward so they don't slip is critical, but equally important is achieving the proper angle of your body so that your rifle is on-target with no last-second adjustment required—what my Marine Corps marksmanship instructors called natural body alignment. It's easy to check. On the range (or in your living room)—with a completely empty rifle, action open, and no rounds nearby—get into position and aim at a target. Close your eyes, and then open them. Are the sights still on target? If not, you may need to adjust your butt one way or the other. Now, still keeping the rifle empty and open with no rounds close at hand, have a buddy get in front of you. Aim in, close your eyes, and have him or her gently push straight back on the rifle, then release. Open your eyes; if your body alignment is proper, the sights or scope should still be on target.

There's no rulebook for field shooting, so regardless of which position you choose, the only time any unsupported position should be used is

when no natural rest or shooting aid is available or you simply don't have time to figure out a better option. Although the formal cross-legged sitting position is familiar to me both from competition and military shooting, I'm pretty sure I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of times I've used it in the field, while I've used the bent-knee sitting position dozens of times.

Either way, however, the sitting position is ideal for enhancement. Many bipods have telescoping legs that are long enough to sit behind, and a short tripod is at least as good. Obviously a rock or log of the right height is a blessing, and a couple of times I've piled up multiple packs to sit behind. Form doesn't matter as much as stability, but ultimately, the most important thing is that the bullet has a clear path to the target. This dictates the height of the



LEFT: With the fore end firmly rested, this is sort of a reverse sitting position, with the shooting-side knee up to support the shooting elbow. Boddington used this position to take a Himalayan tahr in Nepal at 465 yards.

position you choose, the rest you use, or whatever clever way you combine positions and rests.

While we're at it, never forget that a clear line of sight isn't enough. With the larger scopes many of us use today, the line of sight is about one-and-a-half inches above the line of bore, and on some of today's long-range setups, there could be a two-inch difference. I've seen guys shoot truck mirrors and hoods while hunting prairie dogs, which sounds pretty stupid until it happens to you. In Turkmenistan, we cornered a small band of urial sheep in

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an ancient Roman pistachio grove, and there was a monster ram in the group. I was scrunched up against a pack on a gentle berm, and I can still see the crosshairs on that ram's chest. Unfortunately, I wasn't seeing enough; at the shot, dirt exploded about 10 feet in front of me, and that ram was gone!

I'm now 40 years removed from the small-bore shooting I did in college and a decade-plus retired from Marine Corps rifle qualification, so it's been a long time since

I've been required to use the formal NRA shooting positions. Even so, I think all four of them—prone, sitting, kneeling, and standing—form a good basis for all rifle shooting, so I still practice all of them for those relatively few occasions when there is no better solution. On the other hand, I'm all for throwing away the rulebook and getting creative. The sitting position allows for much creativity.

Since there are always magazine articles to write, I try to remember to have someone grab a camera and photograph my shooting position after I take a shot. I have a lot of shooting shots using a pack for a rest, so that's probably a specific column for the future. But there's a seriously modified sitting position that has shown up in enough photos to be worth mentioning. If you're

sitting behind a solid rest or shooting aid such as a low tripod, then some combination of height of rest and clear path to the target determines how high or low you must sit, but it is no longer necessary—and often not possible—to support your elbows over your knees. However, even over a solid rest you will be a whole lot steadier if you can stabilize your shooting elbow. So, with the fore end rested over something, I often cock my shooting-side leg up so I can stabilize my shooting-side elbow with my knee. An upright pack can also be used, and a smaller daypack can be put on your lap, too, for elbow support.

A few years ago, with light going fast, we finally got onto a big mule deer on my friend Tom Arthur's place. The buck was moving down a little draw below me, so I

needed some height to see him. I threw a jacket over a bushy sagebrush for fore-end support, then upended my pack for elbow support. It was a pretty weird position, but it worked. Unfortunately, that time I was way too excited to get a picture! ■

LEFT TO RIGHT: Pack—Options for enhancing the sitting position really are endless. At the SAAM shooting school, Doug Pritchard shows Caroline Boddington how to sit behind a tripod and use a backpack for elbow support. **Tripod**—It's always a good idea to practice various options on the range. Here Donna Boddington practices sitting with a short tripod. **Sticks**—The sitting position can be endlessly modified and enhanced. In Pakistan's Himalayas, Boddington spread his shooting sticks low and sat in deep snow for a shot at a Himalayan ibex.

