


CRAIG  
BODDINGTON  
PROFESSIONAL MEMBER  
Photos Courtesy of Author



# ACCURATE HUNTER

## STICKOLOGY


*I have often stressed that it's important to have as wide a repertoire of ways to get steady as possible. Yes, but we will each develop our favorites, and none of us will be equally comfortable with all shooting positions and all types of rests.*

It's hard to say exactly where shooting sticks were developed. Perhaps simultaneously all over the place—because they work so well! The image of the circa 1875 bison hunter with his big single shot rested over crossed sticks is part of the legend of the Old West. In the mountains of Europe I've noticed that a lot of jaegers use their hiking staffs to steady both spotting scopes and rifles. And of course the three-legged shooting sticks are almost universal in Africa.

One, two, or three legs—monopods, bipods, and tripods—are primary options, but not the only. I've seen commercial four-legged contraptions that, when used right, are almost like a portable bench rest. But there is a limit to how much you want to carry, so for me three legs are plenty. In general, stability does increase with the number of legs. But this depends a whole lot on how much you practice, and also the shooting positions you're able to use.

I will admit right now that I'm pretty hopeless with a monopod. I don't use them much, so I don't practice with them; therefore, I'm not very good with them. However, even without a lot of practice, an upright hiking staff is far better than standing unsupported for a quick shot...and if you kneel with your supporting hand grounding your walking stick it can help you a lot.

With two-legged arrangements, there are two-legged shooting sticks, crossed sticks—and then there are bipods. Because I've used (and practice with) three-legged shooting sticks so much, I am very comfortable and steady with them. But I am not as comfortable with two-legged shooting sticks, which I'm thinking of as a standing rest. A lot of shooters really like them—two-legged sticks are lighter and faster to set up than three-legged sticks. For me,



In the Marines they say you have to “train the way you’re going to fight.” In field shooting, you must practice the way you’re going to shoot. Varmint shooting off of shooting sticks—or whatever field rest you intend to use—is awesome practice for field shooting at big game.

they’re better than nothing, you bet. But when standing against a two-legged arrangement, I get a major up-and-down wobble. The old crossed-stick arrangement that (at least as legend has it) the bison hunters favored is better. Any time you can get closer to Mother Earth, it’s always better, and the intent with crossed sticks is to sit down and rest the fore-end over them. There are models with telescoping legs that can go from sitting to standing—and there are shorter models for belt carry. Or, imagine that you can make your own. I must say, however, that even when I’m sitting behind crossed sticks I *still* get an up-and-down wobble, though less pronounced than when standing behind them.

Undoubtedly this is a matter of needing more practice. I have often stressed that it’s important to have as wide a repertoire of ways to get steady as possible. Yes, but we will each develop our favorites, and none of us will be equally comfortable with all shooting positions and all types of rests. I prefer three-legged sticks, and a favorite

set almost always travels with me. We’ll move on to the tripod rest shortly, but first let’s talk about bipods.

There are numerous varieties, but for me the steadiest are those that attach securely to the rifle, usually at the forward sling swivel stud. Several accessory companies offer them; the granddaddy and the bipod I’m most familiar with is from Harris Engineering. They offer several models—including bipods that allow the rifle to swivel on uneven ground and models with telescoping legs that go up enough to allow shooting from sitting and kneeling positions. It isn’t all that often that terrain and vegetation allow use of a prone position, so I much prefer telescoping legs. Like everything else, using these bipods requires practice. Also, you shouldn’t attach and reattach them willy-nilly without knowing what you’re dealing with; some rifles will change zero when a bipod is attached.

They do add weight and bulk to the rifle and are impossible in saddle scabbards—so they are not for all seasons and all reasons.



In the field, extra sticks give extra options. This shot was taken on top of a termite mound in Tanzania. We know there’s a sitatunga bull out there in the papyrus. I’m ready with my African Sporting Creations sticks set low, but we have a tall set in case I can’t see through grass. I took a nice bull from exactly this position.



However, they do offer awesome stability. Since an attached bipod becomes essentially a part of the rifle, it is the same as resting the rifle itself on solid ground. With an attached bipod I don't have the up-and-down wobble that I have with crossed sticks or a two-legged standing rest. In fact, with a bit of practice, there is no wobble at all. I often use them in fairly open country where solid, natural rests are uncommon but shooting from prone—or at least sitting—is likely. Good examples are a lot of pronghorn country and much caribou country.

Given a choice, I will always use a solid natural rest, often with a backpack—or an attached bipod if I have one. However, three-legged shooting sticks are a major default position. I didn't learn to use them over here. I first saw them in Africa. But they are marvelously effective, and I'm starting to see them a lot more here in North America.

They are especially ideal for African situations because low brush—almost always extremely thorny—often preclude shooting from a low position. Hey, make no mistake—in Africa, just as well as Alabama or Alaska—I'll rest over a boulder or a solid tree limb before I'll stand to shooting sticks! But three-legged sticks are almost universal in Africa because they work and are ideal to the situation. They may not be as ideal for other situations—but they still work.

Whether you prefer one, two, three (or more?) legs, the rules are pretty much the same. You need to learn the right height for you, and you need to learn how to best place your hand to tie the rifle and the rest together. For my standing position, I set the rest at about the level of my first shirt button—not at the throat, but just below. This allows me to lean into the rest and tie it together. I do this with my supporting hand, grasping the fore-end with my thumb and first two fingers and using the other two fingers to weld the rest to the rifle. This works for me, but only you can determine what works for you, so it's important to experiment at the range, determining what works for you and what is fastest and steadiest.

It's pretty simple to make your own three-legged shooting sticks, but I prefer commercial models with legs that break down. This means I can put a set in my gun case, but more importantly, I can unscrew one (or two) segments and use the tripod for a sitting or kneeling position—or simply to be ready in a blind. Trust me, I've tried them all. My preference is three-legged shooting sticks with jointed segments because they do it all, including acting as a hiking staff. But if you're going to use three-legged sticks in that mode, it's important to strap, tape, or tie the legs closely together, otherwise one leg is sure to catch on a rock and break! ■

**TOP:** Commercial shooting rests come in all shapes, sizes, and complexity. This "Magnum" rest from Caldwell can replicate a benchrest for stability, but it's probably not going to be carried too far from a vehicle or blind. **MIDDLE:** Attached bipods are marvelous when they can be used, but getting the height right is always a challenge. You have to be creative; the legs don't have to be on the ground, but line of sight must clear any and all obstructions. **BOTTOM:** In some situations, two sticks can be better than one. I'm using one conventionally, with a second set under the butt. This creates almost a standing benchrest, allowing a 400-yard shot with relative ease—a distance that is almost impossible over one set of sticks.