

SHOOTING TECHNIQUES WITH PROPER EQUIPMENT



Prone shooting is the most stable of all field shooting positions and it can work in many hunting situations. Don't forget the rear support!

Our past articles have mainly addressed setting up our rifles, scopes and ammunition for long range shooting. No matter how good our shooting equipment is, we still need to do our part to put the bullet where it goes. To use our equipment to its fullest potential, we need to apply all of our techniques from the bench to our field shooting positions. In our shooting courses, we teach a few simple techniques to get our students shooting half-MOA groups out to 1,000 yards off of a nice set of Caldwell shooting rests.

When we move to field shooting positions, the same guys that were shooting 5 inch groups at 1,000 yards start missing the 24" steel target! This topic of bringing our field shooting accuracy up to benchrest performance is one of the most vital as we increase our long range shooting capability.

Let's first examine what makes shooting from the bench so accurate, then we can analyze which parts can apply to our field shooting. From a simplistic, outsider's view, we could say that benchrest shooting starts with three basic fundamentals.

**by Aaron Davidson,
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"The Best of the West"**

First, to get extreme accuracy, you must start with a stable platform. A very heavy and stable bench is required to get the best results. We use a steel bench that has the seat attached to the frame. When we are sitting on the seat the total mass is close to 400 pounds! Many of the top ranges use a concrete top and steel legs. Basically, a rigid frame and more mass make a stable platform.

The next building block for benchrest accuracy is a stable, two-point shooting rest. You will want to support the front and the rear of the rifle. The rule is, the farther apart the support points are, the more stable the platform. Caldwell makes several models of front shooting rests. We prefer the Rock BR (bench rest). It allows coarse and fine adjustments for elevation and windage. It is also very stable. We will combine this with a rabbit ear bag for the rear rest. Micro adjustments can be made by squeezing the rear rest with your non-shooting hand.

The last component, and I feel the most overlooked, is the necessity for free recoil. Let me define what I mean- when a rifle is fired and the bullet starts down the bore, the rifle will react in the opposite direction. It's basic physics. This is intuitive, but the consequences aren't as readily apparent. The gun will actually have significant rearward travel before the bullet leaves the bore. It is on the order of a tenth of an inch. When we think about all the reaction and movement that is happening, and how little it takes to move your crosshairs, it's apparent that the rifle must recoil the same every time to keep the point of impact the same.

To get free recoil, a benchrest shooter will use nice, hard, leather bags that fit the profile of the rifle stock. He will also put consistent pressure into the recoil pad with his shoulder (something like 5-10 lbs. will work without causing muscle fatigue), and maintain a consistent grip that doesn't torque the rifle.



Bench shooting requires a good front and rear rest setup for two point support. This Rock BR front rest from Caldwell is one of my favorites.

Clearly, benchrest techniques are more involved, but these three points are the foundation for more accurate field shooting. To make sure we get the one-shot performance in the field, we need to adopt these benchrest techniques to equipment suited for hunting situations.


First, the ground is our solid platform. The closer we can get, the more stable we can be. Prone shooting positions are the first choice for long range shooting. A bipod is the front rest of choice. The two support legs form a triangle—the perfect support structure. A backpack or a coat on a rock could serve in a pinch. Most bipods try to copy the successful Harris style. The trick with the Harris is to load the legs forward, so it recoils freely. The secret weapon with a bipod or any other front rest with prone shooting is to use a rear support. This makes for the same rock solid platform we use when shooting from the bench.

The rear rest is the most overlooked component of prone shooting. You either have to carry one in the field or make one up when you get there. Darrell Holland is making a nice little bag with minimum weight, and one of the Caldwell rear bags works well. Your rolled-up rain gear or camera bag works without adding additional gear to your pack. You can even grab the right sized rock and run the bottom of the stock in the notch of your off hand—this is solid, and it provides fine adjustments. The bottom line is a solid rear rest and slight, down-pressure will put you into long range capability immediately.

The downside with prone is that many situations in hunting conditions don't allow us to get that close to the ground. Usually grass and other vegetation can cause obstructions. Even terrain can cause awkward shooting positions. For example, shooting across a canyon on a downhill slope. In these cases, we need to adopt a sitting position that can give us the same two-point support. Just a plain set of Stoney Point sticks can get us out there a few hundred yards, but if we go to a tripod and rear support, we can push out beyond 500 yards. We've used the Stoney Point Explorer tripod and Tag-along for several years with excellent success. They are rather difficult to learn, however.

My good friend, Todd Sholly from Red Rock Precision in Utah, uses a heavy Manfrotto camera tripod with a front sandbag to support the front, and a Stoney Point bipod to support the rear. This is the most stable platform you can adapt to the sitting and even standing situations we might see in the field. We've even started inserting a special adapter for the Rapid Pivot bipod in the rear of the Gunwerks rifle stocks. This provides good control of a bipod or rear support without all the hassle of adjusting another piece of equipment.

Another unique piece of equipment is The Claw. It clamps the rifle rigidly and attaches to a video tripod and head. The adjustments are very smooth, and it supports the gun without hands. We're testing to confirm consistent point of impact. Initial results show that with the right tripod leg orientation it works very well. The inventors have used it to make very amazing shots at extreme range.

As with everything that we are constantly learning about long range, you need to find what works for you and practice in field shooting situations. A two-point support means you need to add the rear rest to every shooting position. This can extend your effective range from 200 to 300 yards all the way to 1,000 yards and beyond. This change may be the most significant improvement many of us can make to our shooting capabilities. Even the \$6,000 Gunwerks shooting systems won't make you a thousand-yard shooter without the right shooting platform and techniques. 



In the field use anything to support the rear of your rifle. If you build a rock rest sandwich your hand between the rocks and the buttstock.



The Claw is a new product that grips the gun to provide complete control. With the right tripod setup very precise shots are feasible.



A second attachment point gives better control for a rear support when sitting or standing.