



South Downs, near Woodingdean



Rottingdean seafront at sunset

Trek-Tech

TrekPod Go Pro

TESTED



Unconvinced by most monopods and fed up with lugging heavy tripods around, **Steve Watkins** puts this lightweight hybrid offering from Trek-Tech to the test

» Guide price £110 » Contact www.johnsons-photopia.co.uk

There are many high points to being an outdoor photographer; the fantastic wild places that we get to see at extraordinary times of the day, the fully engaging process of seeking out compositions, and the pleasure we take in pausing for a moment to savour the silence that often exists in our 'office'. However, if there is one down side to heading off into all of these wonderful places, then it is the need for us to become beasts of burden.

Whether I'm just going out on a short jaunt onto the local South Downs, or jetting off to one of the world's most exotic locales, the hardest thing to do is to pare down the equipment that makes it into the camera pack. The 'just in case' demon sits on my shoulder and chirrup away in my ear; 'Oh, well there is the one place where you might be able to get some glorious flowers to add strong foreground interest, so you have to take the super wideangle lens. And those timid, cute animals are going to need the big zoom.

Then you always need spare batteries, all your filters, the extenders, remote release, food, drinks...and of course your weightiest tripod, just in case it's windy!' By the time the demon has shut up, I am faced with carrying a load that would challenge your average Himalayan porter. Something has to give.

Depending on the time of day I am heading out, and the nature of the walk ahead of me, the thing that seems to most often miss the cut these

days is...shock, horror...the tripod. With fast, image-stabilised lenses, and sensors that perform miracles in low light, the overt need for a hefty support is dwindling with each new camera or lens release. But, boy, do I feel guilty walking out the door without it.

So, the TrekPod Go Pro had me intrigued. I've never been a fan of monopods, as they seem to fall short in so many ways when you are out in the field. But the TrekPod promised to be far

MAGMOUNT PRO

Trek-Tech have come up with a superb way of attaching the cameras to the TrekPod; the MagMount Pro. This incredibly powerful, toothed magnet securely and quickly clamps cameras up to 6kg. A small clip swings around to ensure there are no mishaps with falling cameras. It is the quickest mounting system I have come across. It comes with an attachment for compacts and lightweight DSLRs, and a heavy force one for more hefty DSLRs. The only downside is that the heavy force attachment needs an allen key to tighten it, which is included but is easy to forget or lose.



Gear test



South Downs, near Woodingdean (L) and Lewes (R)



Sunset at Rottingdean

more than a monopod, and almost a tripod, but without anywhere near the weight penalty. It is also a sturdy walking staff, too. Could it help me avoid the guilt of tripod abandonment?

Well, the most crucial thing is that it is, indeed, very light, weighing in at a paltry 793g, including the ingenious camera mounting system (more of this later). You would be lucky to find a set of tripod legs that light, but once you add a head in, the weight will be a fair way north of 800g, that's for sure – or just be too flimsy to be able to deal with a decent SLR camera. This light weight is achieved through the use of aircraft grade aluminium alloys in its construction. The TrekPod feels so light in its compact, black nylon case that you would not have to give it a second thought before packing it for a trip into the hills – or even for an overseas jaunt, as it all packs down to just 58.4cm long, which should fit into your carry on luggage.

Assembling the TrekPod is straightforward enough. It comes in four pieces, with the top three sections connected via the simple and effective twist and lock collars, which all feature a soft touch rubber grip. The lower section,

which features the tripod legs, is attached via a screw thread. After a couple of times putting it together, the whole process takes just a minute.

Finely machined, the TrekPod feels incredibly sturdy, and as a walking staff, you would be happy entrusting your weight to it over difficult terrain (just as with any walking pole, make sure you do up the collars tightly to avoid the pole unexpectedly telescoping!). The expanded foam grip is comfortable in the palm and offers a good level of grip when used with the attached webbing wrist loop. The height can be adjusted, with a marked range from 106.7cm to 158.8cm, in monopod or walking staff mode. I'm six foot tall, and found the 125cm mark about right for most walking conditions.

There are two ingenious parts to the TrekPod, which stand it apart from monopods, in one instance, and from both monopods and tripods in the other. The first are the tripod leg extensions at the base of the TrekPod. When it is in monopod/walking staff mode, the legs are folded away and securely held by a powerful hook and loop strap. When you need a bit of extra stability or want to have both hands free to do something like change a lens or adjust menu settings, you can unleash the legs and flick them out to give a tripod base to the monopod. With the legs out, the working height range of the TrekPod drops to 99cm to 146cm. In tripod mode, the TrekPod isn't sturdy enough to leave a big camera on unattended; a heavy DSLR, like the Canon 1DS MkIII, will have it swaying when it is fully extended. However, if you are in close proximity, it does allow you to go hands free, which is far better than handling a monopod. The tripod legs also add extra stability over the monopod mode when shooting images, although again this works better with a lighter camera, such as my Canon G9 that I also tested. The stability increases the lower the working height of the TrekPod. The second ingenious offering is

the extraordinary MagMount attachment, for fixing your camera to the TrekPod (*see previous page sidebar*).

The small ball and head socket works well, with a small lever for quickly adjusting the camera angle. It also has a slot for shooting vertical images, which is really useful for quickly changing orientation. You can adjust the height of the ball head too, by extending the top section out of the padded handle tube. ■

LIKES

- » Very lightweight
- » Compact for travel
- » Superb MagMount Pro magnetic attachment system
- » Sturdy
- » Excellent build quality

DISLIKES

- » Separate allen key for attaching camera mounts
- » Sways when fully extended with heavy DSLR

THE VERDICT

I have to say that my dislike of monopods has been rather shaken by the TrekPod Go Pro. The lightness and sturdiness of the unit is impressive, and I would happily pack it for just about any trip where weight was an issue. Although it obviously doesn't give you the same level of support as a heavyweight tripod, it does offer far more support than a heavyweight tripod that you left at home! It is a real step ahead of any monopod I have used, and makes for a good walking pole, too. All in all, it makes for a really useful addition to your equipment pool, and I think you may be surprised at just how much you end up using it. Your pictures will be sharper than having no tripod at all or a simple monopod, and your knees and back will be forever thankful for shedding some grams.

RATINGS

Handling	80%
Performance	85%
Specification	90%
Value	85%
Overall	85%