

A Selection of Bino-Mounts

Tips from readers show that comfortable binocular views can be yours with a minimum of effort and expense. | **By Gary Seronik**

ONCE IN A WHILE — WHENEVER THE FILE FOLDER GETS TOO FAT — WE run a selection of short equipment-related items under the heading of Tele-Tips. My most recent perusal of this bulging folder turned up an unusually large number of binocular mounts, some of which were inspired by George Leonberger's article describing Texas Slim, which appeared in the August 2001 issue, page 124.

Binocular observing provides a uniquely relaxing way to enjoy the night sky — sometimes. Too often the enjoyment is compromised by views that are shaky to the point that stars dance around like drops of water on a hot frying pan. And there is also the discomfort of holding glasses while viewing near the zenith.

Most observers know that for binoculars to deliver their best views, they need to be supported in some fashion. The question is how to accomplish this without giving up too much of the instrument's quick-look appeal. Fortunately, a number of amateurs have attacked this vexing problem with ingenuity and imagination. Presented here is a selection of interesting solutions recently submitted by readers.

Keeping It Simple

When it comes to simplicity, it's hard to beat Arkansas amateur Chris Flynn's binocular support. All it took was a trip to the broom and mop aisle of the local hardware store, where he found a telescoping

duster. The duster's head assembly is conveniently angled at 70°, and the binoculars are attached with a utility strap. Says Flynn, "The total cost was about \$15, and it sure is worth it to save my arms from tiring while holding my 10 × 50s skyward!"

Don't let the basic approach of Flynn's mount deceive you — even this minimal support makes a vast difference to the steadiness of the view. Any well-stocked hardware store will offer alternatives that will likely work just as well, although the details of how to attach binoculars will vary. The telescoping poles for extending the reach of paint rollers, or even a broom handle, can be pressed into service with gratifying results.



CHRIS FLYNN

Chris Flynn's trip to the hardware store yielded this binocular mount made from a long-handled duster. Although minimal in cost, this simple arrangement provides a means of steadying the view in his 10 × 50s.

In a similar vein is Aaron Bransky's "crutchpod." Why use a crutch? As Bransky notes, "A crutch is strong and lightweight, its height can be adjusted, and I had two in the basement!"

The binoculars are attached to a commercial tripod adapter, which is clamped to the top of the crutch. The crutchpod can be used from a seated or standing position, depending on what part of the sky you're trying to reach.



Far left: Aaron Bransky's son, Joel, shows how to use the "crutchpod." From a seated position, and with the crutch adjusted for length, the observer can access different regions of the sky. **Left:** Three pieces of wood and some hardware are pretty much all that is needed to build a crutchpod. The length of wood parallel to the binoculars provides a flat surface so that the assembly can be set down safely on its side. Courtesy Aaron Bransky.

Adler's Binocular T-Pod

Alan Adler's name will be familiar to most readers of this department — his innovative telescope-making ideas have appeared here several times. When he brought his creativity to bear on the problem of supporting binoculars, he came up with several solutions. Three of them are described here, including his simple but clever T-Pod.

The main component of the T-Pod is a standard camera monopod with a wooden bar attached at either end. When you view from a seated position, the mount's bottom bar is anchored under the observer's feet and the binoculars rest against the top bar. "Originally I fixed the binoculars to the top with a camera swivel fitting but later discovered that the dowel was just as stable and allowed much easier panning of the sky," notes Adler.

Putting a T-Pod together takes minimal effort. The binocular-support bar is simply a 6-inch length of 1-inch wood doweling with a $\frac{1}{4}$ -20 threaded insert to accept the monopod's screw. At the foot end, the monopod is clamped into a



Left: Brandon Adler is seen here using the T-Pod, a photographic monopod that has been modified for binocular use. Courtesy Alan Adler.

Below: The base of the T-Pod slips into a hole and is clamped in place when the bolt visible in the foreground is tightened. Two wooden feet improve steadiness on uneven ground. Courtesy Alan Adler.



slightly oversize hole drilled into a piece of 1-by-2-inch wood. The clamping mechanism is simply a slot cut in the wood and a bolt that, when tightened, compresses the hole and grips the monopod. The result is a very portable and effective binocular support. Says Adler,

"The T-Pod fits in my suitcase and has traveled on many airplanes. If I had to choose just one binocular aid, it would be this one."

A Pair of Bino-Chairs

A less portable but appealing solution to the problem of achieving a comfortable and steady binocular view is a dedicated observing chair. Adler's second contribution is a simple modification to a \$20 folding lawn chair. By raising the chair's arms and adding a sleeve of insulating foam for a headrest, Adler transformed the chair into a binocular mount. As he notes, "The elevated armrests greatly enhance the stability of the view and reduce fatigue."

The parts list consists of four pieces of wood, four hinges, and two sets of nuts and bolts. The hinges retain the chair's folding feature. On each side, one hinge joins the elevated arm to the support strut and the other attaches the support strut to the chair's original arm. A bolt passing through the elevated arm and into the back of the chair provides a pivot point and supports the arm's other end.

For those seeking a more sophisticated binocular chair, Donald Parson

has come up with a design that has much to recommend it. "For a long time I had been thinking of some means of support for binoculars, and as you can see, my arrangement is simple and portable."

In addition to a chair, Parson's setup consists of a length of electrical conduit bent to a right angle, two pulleys mounted in wooden blocks, a bungee cord, and a wooden clamp that captures the knotted end of the bungee cord. This clamp can be slid up and down the conduit until the binoculars are positioned at a comfortable height for the observer.



DONALD PARSON

Above: Donald Parson demonstrates the use of his bungee-cord binocular mount. A chair with wooden arms makes construction simple.

Left: Each of the elevated arms of Adler's bino-chair utilizes a pair of hinges and a bolt to retain the chair's original ability to fold up for storage. Courtesy Alan Adler.

Bruynesteyn's Bowling-Ball Bino-Mount

The old expression "What goes around, comes around" is especially apt for builders of astronomical equipment. Ideas are endlessly recirculated and modified — often with wonderful results, such as Bob Bruynesteyn's binocular mount. This California amateur took a long look at Randall Wehler's bowling-ball-mounted 6-inch Maksutov (S&T: June 1996, page 75) and decided he could modify the design to support his 10 × 70 binoculars.

The binoculars are secured to a wooden arm that attaches to the bowling ball via a piece of oak fitted with a pair of short dowels that are epoxied into two



BOB BRUYNESTEYN

Taking his cue from other telescope builders, Bob Bruynesteyn put together this binocular mount, which utilizes a bowling ball and aluminum crutches.



BOB BRUYNESTEYN

The bowling ball of Bruynesteyn's mount rides on three blocks of wood. The counterweight shaft rests on the hinged block (at right), which is flipped into place while the binoculars are being attached.

of the ball's finger holes. Opposite the binocular arm, Bruynesteyn drilled a new hole to accommodate an 18-inch-long piece of 1-inch aluminum rod that serves as a counterweight shaft. This assembly rides on three 4-by-3-by-¾-inch blocks of oak mounted on a hardwood base. The wood blocks could be faced with Teflon furniture glides, but Bruynesteyn found that a slight bevel on the edge that bears against the bowling ball works fine. "I can now sit in comfort and point the binoculars anywhere in the sky and enjoy a steady view. All in all, it's a very sturdy yet portable mount that sets up in no time."

The H-Frame Support

As comfortable as seated binocular observing is, when it comes to scanning near the zenith, nothing beats lying down. Adler's third contribution is his H-frame. "I made this mount for one purpose only — to view the February 1998 solar eclipse from Curaçao, where the Sun's altitude was 60°. It turns out to work well for night-sky viewing too."

There is little to the construction that is not obvious from the photograph above. In addition to the basic H structure, there is the pivoting beam that the binoculars are attached to. A pair of angle brackets, bolts, washers, and wingnuts provide what little adjustment is needed. A pillow beneath the observer's head completes the setup. "The



Adler's H-frame binocular mount is the essence of simplicity yet offers the ultimate in comfort for viewing near the zenith. A pillow or some other adjustable headrest is also needed. Courtesy Alan Adler.

H-frame worked flawlessly for the eclipse and weighs only 1 pound. However, it is limited to an altitude range of 50° to 80°," adds Adler. Nonetheless, if lying

down and scanning the sky near the zenith appeals to you, the H-frame will be worth the modest effort involved in building it.



GARY SERONIK enjoys binocular views, especially steady ones, and writes this magazine's *Binocular Highlight* column.