

Camera Equipment Review...

Kirk BH-1 Ball Head

Unless otherwise noted, text and photography copyright Jim Erhardt
All rights reserved.



BH-1 photo compliments of www.kirkphoto.com

If you're anything like me, the prospect of buying a new piece of camera equipment is always something to get excited about. Certain items, like a new lens or camera body is something to look forward to with great anticipation. Even a new flash or camera bag will get me pumped up and looking forward to the day I receive it.

However, there are certain items that never got me enthused enough to spend a pile of money on. Five years ago I bought a Bogen 3221 tripod, and in combination with a Bogen 3055 ball head, cost about \$150. It has served me reasonably well and was about all I cared to spend on camera support equipment. The thought of spending in excess of \$1,200 for a carbon fiber tripod and a high-end ball head has kept such a purchase very low on my list of priorities. After all, the only function of these devices is to hold up your camera equipment, right?

While the Bogen 3055 head has been satisfactory, its hexagonal-style quick release plate has always been bulky and tricky to seat. If you're not careful, it can be partially seated in the head's clamping mechanism and allow the camera and lens to come loose and crash to the ground. Luckily for me, I was forewarned of this and always double-checked to be certain that the plate was fully seated before throwing the whole rig over my shoulder. My other misgiving about the inexpensive Bogen 3055 ball head is the fact that it's difficult to lock in a precise position, and it barely holds my EOS 1n and EF 300/4L without creeping.

After using this entry-level ball head for 5 years, I decided it was time to upgrade.

Since I've had the opportunity to try some of the very best ball heads available on a first-hand basis, I decided I would take the plunge and buy something that would be "the last ball head I'll ever have to buy." With that in mind, I contacted Kirk Enterprises and ordered their BH-1. Along with the ball head, I also ordered their PZ-9 camera body plate and LP-1 lens plate.

Once the Kirk product arrived, I immediately removed the old 3055 ball head and installed the BH-1. The installation was fast and simple on the Bogen 3221 tripod, and in short order I had the entire setup ready to go.

The Kirk BH-1 is patterned after the Arca-Swiss B1 ball head, and includes a panning knob for locking/unlocking the panning mechanism (which includes a degree scale and reference mark), a large control knob for locking/unlocking the ball, and a variable-tension knob for adjusting the tension on the ball. The BH-1 uses Arca-style quick release plates, and a captive knob on the quick release clamp is used to lock the plate in place. The ball tilts to 45-degrees in any direction, and to 90-degrees in the vertical notch. The head is 4.5 inches in height and weighs 32 ounces, and is covered by Kirk's Satisfaction Guarantee and a full 5-year warranty. The entire unit is extremely well crafted and operates very smoothly. The ball locks firmly in place with no creep. As opposed to the 3055, I can compose an image, lock the ball and it all stays precisely in place.





In the field, the BH-1 is a pleasure to use. Its superb build and craftsmanship ensures smooth operation and a secure hold on the composition, even in macro work. I can carry the tripod over my shoulder without fear of the ball head slipping and the camera ending up lying on its side against the tripod. The use of the Arca-style quick release plates on my telephoto lenses and camera body makes switching equipment a breeze, and the slim profile of the plates keeps their permanent residence on my lenses and camera unobtrusive. The camera body plate includes a ¼" tapping on the bottom, so that the camera can be mounted on a monopod without having to remove the plate.

The BH-1 is available directly from Kirk Enterprises for \$339.95, which includes a universal lens/camera body plate. You can view more information on the BH-1 ball head and other Kirk products on their web site at www.kirkphoto.com or call them toll-free at 1-800-626-5074.

The BH-1 now permanently resides on my tripod. As with with the Canon "L" glass, "pro" camera bodies and other high-end photography products I have purchased in the past, the benefits of using a high quality ball head are now abundantly clear. Do I have any regrets about purchasing the Kirk BH-1 ball head? Only one - I waited way too long to do so!

About the images...

- *Top* - Kirk's BH-1 ball head. Photo compliments of www.kirkphoto.com
- *Center* - BH-1 installed on Bogen 3221 tripod. Canon EOS 1n mounted in BH-1 using the low profile PZ-9 camera plate. The plate remains mounted to the camera body, its low profile keeping its presence unobtrusive.
- *Bottom* - Using a Canon EOS 1n and an EF 300/4L with a 25mm extension tube mounted on the BH-1, locking down the ball while precisely maintaining the composition of this wild grass was a breeze with the BH-1. Other than a slight crop from the top, image is full frame on Fuji Velvia.

JE-NPN 001

Comments on this article? Send them to the [editor](#).

Print This Page using Adobe Acrobat Reader 

[\[Front Page\]](#) [\[Reader's Forum\]](#) [\[Letters\]](#) [\[Links\]](#) [\[Features\]](#) [\[Reviews\]](#) [\[Photo Tips\]](#) [\[Photo Itineraries\]](#) [\[Personal Galleries\]](#) [\[Gift Shoppe\]](#)

All content copyright 2000 - 2001, Nature Photographers Online Magazine, Inc. All rights reserved.