

# Boot Buying Basics

## Get "boot smart" to get the footgear that's right for you.

Don't be intimidated if you don't have and can't afford a pair of super-ace Mountain Goat expedition boots. However, if you can afford decent hiking boots, you'll be more confident in off-trail situations where traction is vital, safer in inclement weather, and probably more secure with a heavy pack.

Cared for properly, good boots will last a long time — often five to 10 years, depending on how hard you and the terrain are on them.

Knowing boot anatomy and available boot features are a big part of the boot buying process.

**Full grain** is the outermost part of the cow's hide; it is the stiffest, most waterproof type of leather. It is sometimes turned inside-out (rough-out) so the smooth, outer layer won't get nicked or scratched.

The **upper** part of the boot should have as few seams as possible. A one-piece upper is more water resistant.

A **gusset** is a thin piece of flexible leather sewn to both the tongue and the upper. It keeps out water and stones. A "bellows" tongue has wide gussets, allowing it to open further so it is easy to put on. Some boots have two "overlapping" tongues, each connected to one side.

The **back-stay** is a strip of leather sewn over the back seam. If it gets torn or chafed, it is almost impossible to replace. For that reason, it should be as narrow as possible.

A **welt** is the stitch which connects the upper sole. A Norwegian welt is double-stitched, strong and stiff. Other welts (Good-year, McKay, etc.) are not as strong but allow more flexibility.

A **rand** is a wide rubber strip protecting the stitching that holds the upper to the sole.

The **sole** has three parts: a padded "footbed" just below your foot, an "insole" below the footbed and an "outsole" on the bottom. The insole can be soft and flexible for light hiking, or it can be stiffened with a half- or full-length "shank" (sheet) of plastic or steel for added support. The sole is made of rubber (Vibram is a type of stiff hard rubber) with a "lug" pattern designed for gripping the path. Deep lugs are best for steep rugged terrain, while shallow lug patterns are lighter and more flexible.

Remarkable new advances have been made in boot design and boot materials of late. Check out the wrap-around high-carbon rubber outer soles on the new trekking boots, which also feature inner Gore-Tex( bootie liners which let your foot breathe and stay dry at the same time. And if you can only afford one pair of boots for walking the streets and the trails, there is now a whole line of "cross-over" lightweights, which work wonders in both environments. (Window) shop till you drop.

## On the Trail of a Good Boot

Consider the following when you're in the market for hiking boots:

■ **Leather or lightweight?** Leather is strong, tough, durable and heavy. Great for serious mountaineering. Lightweights are made of plastics, nylon and other synthetics. They literally take a burden off your feet. Sturdy, flexible, and comfortable, they are perfect for hiking and most backpacking.

■ **Soles.** The thicker the Vibram rubber sole and the deeper the treads or "lugs," the greater the traction but the heavier the boot. Likewise, the stiffer the "mid-sole" layer above the rubber sole, the stronger but less pliable and comfortable the boot. Day hikers don't need steel/plastic mid-soles; mountaineers do.

■ **Welts.** Welts are stitching systems that join boot to sole. The better the welts, the stronger the join. Hence welts make shoes that are more water-tight, more durable, though perhaps less flexible. Lighter shoes use bonding-cement joins.

Aside from the appropriateness of the boot (you don't want technical mountaineering boots, unless of course you are a technical mountaineer) and the cost, the all-important consideration is size. Get it right. You and your hiking mates will regret it if you don't. Seek out a reputable store and an experienced salesperson to find the best fit. Wear the same socks (or inner and outer socks) you'll be wearing on the trail.

Unless you're replacing a specific size and model, exercise extreme care with mail order purchases or discount-mall shopping. There are too many variations in the human foot and body to take chances. Someone who's flat-footed and 240 pounds won't be comfortable in the same boot as someone who has a high arch and weighs 145, even though both may have size 10 feet.

Like a podiatrist, a knowledgeable salesperson will consider several measurements: heel to toe, heel to ball-of-foot, width at various spots, and overall shape. She or he will check how you walk—do your ankles roll in or out? — and ask about things like bunions and bone spurs as well as your hiking habits before recommending a boot for your foot and your needs.

Don't be surprised if you discover in the process that your left and right feet differ in size, especially when "weighted." Boots are one of the few items that are hard to rent. So the money you spend — not less than \$80 and more likely over \$125 — is a long-term investment. Plunge wisely, watch for sales, and see if the salesperson will bargain.

# BSA Wilderness Use Policy

For the purposes of this policy, all privately or publicly owned backcountry and designated wildernesses are to be considered "wilderness." The Outdoor Code of the Boy Scouts of America applies to outdoor behavior generally, but for treks into wilderness, Leave No Trace camping methods must be used. Within the outdoor program of the Boy Scouts of America, there are many different camping-skill levels. Camping practices that are appropriate for day outings, long-term Scout camp, or short-term unit camping do not apply to wilderness areas. Wherever they go, Scouts and Venturers must adopt attitudes and patterns of behavior that respect the rights of others, including future generations, to enjoy the outdoors.

In wildernesses, it is crucial to minimize our impact on particularly fragile ecosystems such as mountains, lakes, streams, deserts, and seashores. Since our recreational use varies from one season of the year to the next, we must adjust to these changing conditions as well, to avoid damaging the environment.

The Boy Scouts of America emphasizes these practices for all troops:

- Contact the landowner or land-managing agency (Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, state agency, private landowner, etc.) well in advance of the outing to learn the regulations for that area and to obtain required permits and current maps.
- Always obtain a tour permit, available through local council service centers. Meet all conditions specified and carry the permit on the trip.
- Participate in Leave No Trace training for adult leaders, or be proficient and experienced in the leadership and skills required for treks into the wilderness.
- Match the ruggedness of high-adventure experiences to the skills, physical ability, and maturity of those taking part. Save more rugged treks for older youth members who are more proficient and experienced in outdoor skills.
- For your group, conduct pretrip training that stresses proper wilderness behavior, rules, and skills for all of the conditions that may be encountered.
- Use backpacking stoves, particularly where the fuel supply is limited or open fires are restricted. An adult knowledgeable in the use of the stove(s) must supervise. If a fire is necessary, keep it as small as possible. Use established fire lays where available in safe areas. After, erase all signs.
- Emphasize the need for minimizing impact on the land through proper camping practices, and for preserving the solitude and quiet of remote areas. Camp at low-use areas; avoid popular sites that show signs of heavy use.
- Leave dogs, radios, and cassette or CD players at home.
- Use plastic (not metal or glass) food containers that are lightweight and reusable. Carry out unburnable trash of your own and any left by others.
- Dig catholes for latrines and locate them at least 200 feet from any source of natural water.
- Wash clothes, dishes, and bodies at least 200 feet from any source of natural water.
- Where a choice is available, select equipment in earth-tone colors that blend with natural surroundings.
- Look at and photograph; never pick or collect.
- Follow trail switchbacks and stay on established trails.
- Treat wildlife with respect and take precautions to avoid dangerous encounters with wildlife. Leave snakes, bears, ground squirrels, and other wildlife alone.
- On a canoeing trip, carry canoes into the foliage on shore so they will not be visible to other outdoor users.
- Respect the quest of others to enjoy the solitude and silence of the backcountry.
- Demonstrate respect by taking care of the outdoors. Land stewardship is everyone's responsibility. Do your part to leave wild America for future generations.