

10 Essentials for Buying Better Boots

- 1, **ASK FOR THE ACE** When you walk into an outdoors store, ask to see the best boot fitter in the shop. If that person is not around, make an appointment to come back.
- 2, **MEASURE YOUR FEET** Don't assume you're a size nine just because that's the size you've always worn. Your feet grow with time and over the course of a long, heavily laden trip and hiking boots should run larger. Boots should be snug everywhere except the very front, where you should have about a half-inch between the end of your toes and the boot. Remove the insole, stand, and measure (there should be one finger's width to the end of the insole from the tip of the longest toe).
- 3, **DON'T GET HUNG UP ON NUMBERS** U.S. sizes vary considerably in their actual length and volume, and one company's ten is another's nine. The key is to try a variety of sizes, then trust your feet to know what fits. Most students try to fit in boots that are too small and snug and feet swell by the end of a hike.
- 4, **SHOP AFTER DARK** Try on boots at the end of the day, when your feet are slightly swollen, like they'll be on the trail.
- 5, **DON'T RUSH** Take your time shopping for boots. Budget at least two consecutive afternoons for shopping and fitting. Try on as many different makes and models as you can. Almost every boot is built a bit differently. Fit usually doesn't improve after break-in. Wear will reduce stiffness but will not help a boot's fit!
- 6, **BYOS** Bring your own socks or (sock combination) to the store so your feet are wearing what they'll wear on the trail. Make sure socks are wool or wool/synthetic combination—NOT COTTON.
- 7, **WIGGLE YOUR TOES** Once boots are laced, you shouldn't be able to kick your toes into contact with the very front of the boot. Boots may gain in width or volume once they break in, but they won't ever get any longer. Too-short boots will bruise your toes and hammer your toenails on a long downhill.
- 8, **GO FOR A WALK** Spend some time hiking around the store in any boot you're considering. The uppers have to warm up for impregnated leathers or stiff fabrics to mold to your foot, which means pressure points may not become obvious immediately. Make sure that your heel does not lift as you are walking up an incline and your toes do not hit the front of the boot as you are walking down the incline!
- 9, **DON'T OVERBOOT** Choose footwear that matches the majority of your trips, not the expedition you might take just one week a year. If the boot's heavier and stiffer than you need, you'll needlessly suffer through the breaking-in and blistering problems of bigger boots.
- 10, **LISTEN TO YOUR FEET** Pick the boot that's most comfortable. Stress that one quality over all others. In the end, only one person will know when you have the perfect fit, and that's you. Don't try to stuff your foot into a boot and expect the boot to stretch...it won't and your feet will swell with hiking.
- 11, **REMEMBER TO CLIP YOUR TOENAILS.**
- 12, **WAIT FOR PERFECTION** You'll know when you feel it: your heel is cradled snugly, your midfoot and arch feel well supported and your toes have wiggle room.

#1 Everyday boot – Rough Trail/Backpacking: Heavier loads and steep slopes cause the foot to twist, swell, and spread, requiring more buttressing in the footbed and ankle areas. With a higher cut (**no low cut hiking shoes**) and semi-rigid soles, rough trail boots walk a line between armored support and striding comfort. Fabric, leather, split-grain leather, and full-grain leather are all used to construct rough trail boots. Most have waterproof/breathable liners for wet weather. **These boots should be purchased in the States and broken in well before arriving in Zermatt and should cover the ankle! You should spend between \$180-250 on this boot. These boots will be used for most hikes (many many miles (km))! (i.e. Asolo: Drifter, Finder; Tecnica: Forge; Salewa: Mountain Trainer,; Solomon: Quest; La Sportiva: Nucleo; Lowa: Renegade, Innox, Lady Light; Scarpa: Zodiac, Kailash; Hoka: Sky Kaha; Arc'teryx: Acrux Acu; Trekker Pro, Cimon).** Boots should have Gore-Tex insulation and waterproofing.

#2 Climbing boot – Mountaineering: Tall, above-ankle coverage and tough materials provide increased leverage for difficult edging. With full-length steel shanks or stiff nylon midsoles, mountaineering boots easily kick steps into hard snow, but are usually too rigid for comfortable full stride hiking. Patient breaking-in is critical with these relatively rigid boots. Because of their crampon compatibility, mountaineering boots are well suited to extended glacier/snowfield travels and for Swiss Semester rock climbing. **Swiss Semester strongly urges you not to get these in the States but rather to rent from the school (minimal fee) when you arrive in Zermatt.**

Most of the information above was provided by *Backpacker Magazine* (www.backpacker.com/gear)

Prevent Blisters:

*Field-Tested Techniques for Eliminating/Alleviating the Three Causes of Blisters: **Heat, Moisture, and Friction***

- Make sure that boots and socks fit well and toenails are cut.
- Act early when you feel a “hot spot”; don’t wait or it will become a blister. Cover with moleskin or “blister pad.”
- Avoid or reduce friction by lubricating. Use skin lubricant before you hike. Reapply every few hours as needed.
- Avoid or reduce friction by covering area with low friction tape (duct tape can work well, but you need to be careful of allergic reactions to the adhesive)
- Ventilate. Wear the most breathable footwear that is appropriate for the activity. Remove socks and boots during rest breaks and change socks whenever they get too damp. Use socks that are wool or synthetic blend and wick moisture away from the foot; **do not use cotton socks**. Some suggest using antiperspirant on your feet to decrease moisture.

Get Strong for Hiking:

Here are some inside appropriate exercises to get you ready for the Swiss Semester and the hiking. Not all of us will be able to recreate the Alps this summer. I think the below link is very appropriate and well-done. Good luck with the exercises.

<https://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/hiking-training.html>

These should be done as time allows and started **at least** two months before you arrive in Zermatt.

You should come to Swiss Semester being able to do a mile around a track in under ten minutes without too much strain.