

Tips from the Old Scout

Tip # 3: Hiking Boots

Tips from the Old Scout is a series of informational articles that will appear on the Troop 201 website each month. They are intended to be an information source for both parents and scouts on a variety of important topics relating to camping, backpacking and hiking.

The subject is hiking boots. There are many items of camping gear where a scout can economize, but hiking boots is not one of them. A quality pair of hiking boots will insure safety and comfort while hiking and camping. Shopping for hiking boots at a dedicated outdoor retailer (for example: Campmor, REI, Eastern Mountain Sports) will offer you a good selection of the right kind of boot. Choose boots with a medium rise to support the ankles while hiking.

Most experts recommend shopping for hiking boots later in the day when the feet may be slightly larger. The hiking boots you choose might be ½ to a full size larger than your regular shoe size. While it's important that they do not slip at the heel, it is equally important that there is room in the toe area, so the toes do not hit the front of the boot when walking downhill. The retailers mentioned above usually have an incline ramp in the store so you can test the fit of the boot in a "downhill" position.

Most boots will have some amount of Gore-Tex or another fabric that allows breathability while still offering some water-resistance. Boots that are completely rubberized may be best for hiking outdoors in the snow, but will be uncomfortable for hiking in the other three seasons.

Those participating in high adventure hiking and backpacking want to be especially certain to choose quality boots that fit well. Make sure the boots are well broken-in before the activity. This helps avoid blisters and other problems that can ruin an outdoor adventure.

A word about socks: do not wear cotton socks with your hiking boots. The old scout prefers Merino wool "hiking" socks. These are sold at all outdoor stores in different blends: 70% wool/30% synthetic is a typical blend. These socks will cushion your feet and wick away moisture from the skin. They will also dry quicker when wet, and unlike cotton, will still insulate your feet when wet.

Some hikers prefer to wear a liner sock in addition to the wool hiking socks in order to prevent blisters. A liner sock is a thin synthetic material sock that is worn under the wool hiking sock. The liner socks also serve to wick away moisture from the skin. Try a pair of liner socks to see if you are comfortable with them. When purchasing hiking boots, be sure to wear the kind of socks you will use when hiking to get a proper fit.

Keep toenails trimmed short to prevent them from hitting the front of the boot (a problem when walking down a steep hill). On a "pack-off" break during a hike, take off your boots to air them out, and allow the socks to dry. Change from damp socks to dry socks when possible (always carry an extra pair).

For Philmont hikers or for other extended camping trips, consider packing a lightweight pair of closed-toe sneakers or sandals to wear around camp at the end of the day.

Remember:

- Hiking boots should be worn on all camping trips, backpacking trips and hikes.
- Shop for hiking boots later in the day, and wear the socks you will use while hiking.
- Make sure hiking boots are well-broken in before wearing them on an extended hiking/camping trip.