



Tips  
from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Every spring, my grandmother would drag me to the shoe store to get a pair of shoes for the summer. I say drag, because I hated going there, having to sit still while you try on shoes that were always two sizes too big.

“You’ll grow into them,” was the phrase heard most often.

For a kid who was “all boy” (and still is for that matter), those shoes were going to be destroyed from outdoor activities long before I ever grew into them. Fortunately for outdoor people, footwear has come a long way in the last 50 years.

Springtime presents a great opportunity to review your footwear collection, discard some of the worn-out pairs, and have ample time to break in properly. If you are like me, it is hard to pitch out a pair of hiking boots, especially thinking of the cost, but foot health and comfort could be at stake.

Try not to think about looks, styles, or fancy features when selecting outdoor footwear. You should probably avoid the advice of others because no two feet, including your own, are identical. Pay more attention to comfort, fit, warmth, durability, support for the activity you will wear them for, and material they are constructed from.

When buying hiking boots or shoes, make sure you have a proper fit. Ignore the little size numbers and width letters. If you wear an 11D normally, but the pair you are trying on hurts your feet, obviously Houston, there is a problem.

Look for a pair that has a snug, but not tight, fit at the heel. A small amount of heel slip is normal for break-in but should disappear in a few walks. There should be about an inch of room for your toes at the front. If you have a style of socks you will wear when you hike in the boots, bring them

along when choosing the right size; don’t guess. Mr. Murphy, of Murphy’s Law fame, will be certain you guess incorrectly.

Spend a long day afield, carrying a heavy pack and covering some miles in a rough terrain with boots that do not fit properly. You can wind up with blisters, blackened toenails, bone spurs, plantar fasciitis, and a lot of other unpleasant miseries.

Pay special attention to the foot bed. The foot bed is what keeps your foot in a neutral position, and not slopping around inside the shoe. If you have a tender spot on your heel or ball of the foot, pain in the arch, or have a heel slip when you walk, it is time to look at inserts. A trip to the drug store or sporting goods store will get you matched up with the correct inserts for your feet.

Materials mean everything when choosing outdoor footwear. Full-grain leather boots are very durable and have good resistance to abrasions. Most boots for backpacking, or carrying heavy loads, and rough terrain, are made with full-grain leather. They are not, however, as light and breathable as some of the other materials.

Split-grain leather is usually used with boots that are partially constructed with nylon or nylon mesh as part of their uppers. In this type of leather, the rougher portion of the cowhide is “split away” from the smooth exterior. These type of boots are cheaper but do not hold up as well to the extremes.

Nubuck leather is full-grain leather that closely resembles suede. Nubuck is very durable and abrasion-resistant but can stain rather easily, similar to suede leather.

That brings us to the synthetic materials for boot construction. This includes polyester, nylon, and genuine imitation leather. These materials are cheaper, lightweight, and dry quickly, but wear easily and don’t hold up well.

I can’t stress enough how important having waterproof footwear is. Wet feet can cause much pain and discomfort and in the winter months, can lead to hypothermia. Look for boots with waterproof Gore-Tex, or at least waterproof linings.

If you choose boots that are not made with waterproofing, you can treat them yourself.



Spring is a great time to get some new boots or shoes for the hiking season. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/Mark Rackay)

Wax and silicone treatments, like Sno-Seal, will help soften the leather, which will also make them more comfortable. These products must be applied often; sometimes during an extended trip.

Leather can be adequately waterproofed by these treatments but water is not the friend of leather. Water degrades leather and causes shrinkage during the drying process. Keep them boots treated often and this won’t be a problem.

Outsoles of outdoor footwear are made of EVA or polyurethane. EVA is softer and gives more shock absorption to your feet but does not give as much support, especially over the rough stuff.

Polyurethane is stiffer and much more durable. Polyurethane is usually found on the soles of high-top backpacking and hunting boots, designed for rough stuff and heavy loads.

Choosing the height of your footwear will depend on the type of activity you plan on wearing them for. If the trails you are going to hike are generally groomed and well kept, and your pack is lightweight, low cut trail shoes will work fine. These are shoes similar to the Merrill style with a stiff outer sole. They look like a running shoe on steroids.

If you are hitting a rougher trail, or heading cross-country and carrying a heavier load in your pack, you will want to look at mid-length

boots. Mid-length offers more support for carrying heavier loads and offers some ankle support. The mid-length boots still offer a fair amount of flexibility at the balls of the feet to traverse the rocky trails.

When you are heading out across rough terrain, such as hunting conditions, and possibly carrying a heavy pack, it is time to look at full-length boots. These will have a much more rigid sole and will provide substantial ankle support. High-top boots require a long break-in period to get the sole and heel cup to soften.

For mid-length and full-length boots, I look for ample padding around the ankles to protect them from rocks. Also look for a padded tongue to help keep laces from cutting into your feet.

Depending on the time of year will determine how much insulation you need. Obviously boots for winter travel are going to require 800 grams of Thinsulate insulation and more. I have boots that have 2,000 grams for extreme conditions. They will keep your feet warm but are nearly impossible to walk great distances in. These pack style boots work well for activities like ice fishing.

During summer months 400 grams of Thinsulate or none at all may be appropriate. Remember that insulation adds weight and bulk to the footwear, making them more

cumbersome to wear, but I’d opt for some insulation rather than none, even during the summer.

I mentioned it earlier, but want to stress waterproof footwear as a necessity. Wet feet lead to chills, cold and hypothermia. Wet feet and socks also lead to blisters, raw spots, nail fungus and trench foot over the long term. Add to that, wet boots are just plain uncomfortable, but entirely unnecessary. Pay attention to that Gore-Tex and waterproof linings for comfort and safety.

One thing you will probably decide for yourself is that you are going to need several types of outdoor footwear. I can’t count the number of boots and trail shoes I have around for all the places I travel, and all the conditions.

My grandmother went for value when she took her boy in to get shod, instead of comfort or style. Maybe that is why I am so particular about my boots. I know I don’t head to the outdoor store kicking and screaming anymore, but my wife does when she sees the bill.

*Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a director for the Montrose County Sheriff’s Posse. For information about the posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email [info@mcspi.org](mailto:info@mcspi.org).*

## Calamity Hills burn set for Monday

SPECIAL TO THE MONTROSE DAILY PRESS

Fire officials for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests’ Grand Valley Ranger District are set to conduct the Calamity Hills prescribed burn, beginning Monday, April 29.

The project area is located 8 miles northeast of Gateway and will burn approximately 1,700 acres of overgrown and decaying vegetation.

Only a single day of ignition is planned with monitoring through the next several days pending forecasted precipitation for mid-week. The purpose for the prescribed burn is to improve vegetation regeneration, wildlife habitat, reduce hazardous vegetation (fuels) build-up and to promote a wild-fire resiliency landscape.

Fire management officers and fuels specialists spend countless hours

developing detailed prescribed fire plans that dictate weather conditions, staffing and safety requirements. Ignitions only occur if conditions are conducive to a safe, effective operation and within appropriate smoke dispersal parameters set by the state of Colorado.

Prescribed fire smoke may affect your health. For more information see: [www.colorado.gov/cdphe/wood-smoke-and-health](http://www.colorado.gov/cdphe/wood-smoke-and-health)

For information on prescribed burns, wildfires and fire restrictions on National Forest System lands and other areas, call the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests Fire Information line at 970-874-6602, visit the GMUG National Forests website ([www.fs.usda.gov/gmug](http://www.fs.usda.gov/gmug)), Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/GMUG.NF>) or Twitter ([https://twitter.com/GMUG\\_NF](https://twitter.com/GMUG_NF)).

DELTA COUNTY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

STORK’S LANDING

970.874.2255 • 1501 E 3rd Street • Delta, CO

we are a  
Baby-Friendly Designated  
birth facility!

f

tw

in

u

WE OFFER:

• Jetted Tubs

• Secure Units

• Central Monitoring

• Breastfeeding Support

• AND SO MUCH MORE!

WE’RE MORE THAN A HOSPITAL ...

we are home to  
YOUR family’s first  
special moments.

The care you need from  
the people you can trust,  
close to home.

DELTA COUNTY  
Memorial  
HOSPITAL

deltahospital.org

14879