HIKING BOOTS

Your feet are your wheels. If they aren’t comfortable and well-protected, you aren’t either. You need boots that are comfortable and well-loved, but also very tough! No matter what kind of boots you buy, you need good ankle support. This means that your boots must cover your ankles. Because we will be carrying heavy backpacks over uneven terrain, greatest stress will be put on your ankles. Protect them—do not bring low to mid-top hiking shoes! One Sport, Vasque, Merrell, Asolo, and Keen are some common and well-constructed boots that come in many varieties of fit, style and price. Make sure you have hiking boots, not work boots. Your feet will be crying after one day of hiking in Doc Martens, Timberlands, Caterpillars, or some other work or stylized type of boot.

Hiking boot uppers come in two different kinds of material. Some swear by traditional leather hiking boots—they give the best ankle support and tend to be more waterproof, and, once they are broken in, they fit your feet like gloves. Others prefer lightweight hiking boots, made of a combination of nylon and leather. They break in more quickly than leather boots and are often cheaper. These are adequate for most of the backpacking we will do, although they do provide less ankle support than sturdy leather boots.

Fitting - Proper fitting of boots is essential. You should try new boots on only in the afternoon since your feet swell during the day. Try the boots on with the hiking socks you will you will actually be wearing. The boots should fit comfortably in the middle range of tension on the laces (so you can tighten or loosen the boots as needed). With your foot flat on the ground, try to lift the heel of your foot up inside the boot. There should be only ¼ - ⅓ inch of heel lift. Some boots are made in Unisex sizing, others are specifically designed for men’s or women’s feet dimensions. If you are at all unsure of fit, go to an outdoor store and have them help you with boot fit. This is one of the most important items on your equipment list so you want to make sure you get a well-constructed and properly fitting boot.

Breaking-in - Break in a pair of boots well before your trip. Begin with short walks and gradually increase the time you wear them to allow the boots to soften and adjust to your feet. Easy day hikes are a good way to break in boots. Walking stairs in a building or local stadium also helps break in your boots and will get you used to walking up and down hills. Each time you lace your boots, take the time to align the tongue and lace them properly, otherwise the tongue will set into a bad position. If you haven’t worn your boots for a while, it is a good idea to wear them for several days before a trip to “re-break” them in.

If you have any further questions about types of boots, brand names, fitting information, or otherwise, please feel free to contact us via email through our website.

CLOTHING

In the Valle Vidal, weather conditions can range from mild to severe! You can count on having a shower for an hour or two pretty much every afternoon, some of which last into the evening and maybe even the next day. You will want to dress in layers so that you can add or take off as weather dictates. These layers are usually made up of a thinner base layer to wick moisture (and for warmth), a middle layer for warmth and an outer windproof or waterproof shell.

Your clothing needs to be made up of synthetic materials or wool. Wool and synthetic fabrics like fleece will help to keep you warm, even when they are wet. Wool works just as well as fleece. There are pros and cons to each (see below). Check the tag on these fabrics—some fleece-like items can be
cotton blends. Cotton absorbs water and does not insulate when wet, making it dangerous in cold environments. **Do not** bring any socks, long underwear, sweaters, or hats that are cotton or cotton blends.

**Base layer** – This layer can be synthetic (polypropylene) or natural wool. Any of the leading manufacturers will offer good synthetic options (Mountain Hardware, North Face, Capilene, Under Armour) or wool (IceBreaker, Smartwool, Patagonia) in a variety of thicknesses, styles and prices. Synthetics tend to dry faster but are a bit more odor absorbing than wool.

**Middle layer** – This layer is often made of a heavier weight fleece or wool than the base layer. Jackets and pullovers made from fleece make excellent insulating layers. Fleece has minimal bulk, less weight, and dries particularly fast. Inexpensive fleece jackets can be found most anywhere nowadays. Wool will keep you just as warm as fleece but tends to be heavier and does not dry as quickly.

**Outer layer** – Your outer layer will be your rain gear (jacket and pants). Rain gear needs to keep water out! It must be waterproof. Rain gear comes in three general categories, increasing in price:

1. Rubberized, PVC-coated rain gear. The cheapest option, you can often find PVC-coated rain pants and rain jackets for $30. PVC-coated rain gear is highly waterproof; its downfall is that it is not at all breathable.
2. Coated nylon rain gear. Coated nylon is more expensive but can still be found for about $70 for both pants and jacket. More breathable than PVC, nylon-coated rain gear is waterproof but not as durable as Gore-Tex.
3. Gore-Tex rain gear. Gore-Tex’s claim-to-fame is that it is both entirely waterproof and breathable. In reality, it is neither perfectly waterproof nor breathable, but of all the options, it does the best job of combining those characteristics. Consequently, it is often prohibitively expensive. The good news is that there are now many Gore-Tex-like materials available that are much less expensive.

Your jacket must have a hood to keep your head dry. Unacceptable raingear includes warm-up jackets, wind-breakers, plain nylon jackets, as well as ponchos designed to fit over backpacks. Any jackets or pants that have a cotton lining are unacceptable. How do you know if your raingear is really waterproof? Wear it in the shower for two to three minutes (seriously!). If you’re still dry after three minutes, your raingear will take good care of you in the wilderness.

**Pants** – Your pants should also be made of synthetic fabric. No jeans or cotton, cargo-type pants should be worn. We recommend the zip-off type pants that can double as shorts. These are readily available at specialty outdoor stores or general sports stores like Academy, Dick’s, or Bass Pro.

**Socks** – Just like any of your other clothing layers, your socks must be made out of synthetic material, wool or wool/poly blends. Cotton blends will leave you cold and unhappy so do not bring any cotton or cotton blend socks. There are lots of high quality sock options (Smartwool, Wigwam, REI).

If you have any questions about fabrics, clothing or raingear that you are buying or borrowing from someone please feel free to contact us via email through our website.

**THE BACKPACK**

With excerpts from *The Backpacker’s Field Manual*:
Most backpacking nowadays is done using an internal frame pack. These packs use a wide variety of materials, aluminum stays, carbon fiber, plastic sheets, and foam to create a rigid “spine” to which the hip belt and shoulder straps are attached. The pack bag runs the full height of the pack, although it may be divided into several compartments. Some internal frame packs come in specific sizes based on the length of your spine, others are adjustable to fit a range of sizes, and others are designed specifically for males or females. Look for good lumbar padding, a conical hip belt, recurved shoulder straps with good padding, and a chest compression strap. A removable top pocket and a bivy extension on the pack bag will let you lift the pocket up and store more gear. Also make sure that the pack has side compression straps to squeeze the pack down if you are carrying a smaller load.

Pack size is an important factor when selecting a pack. You need to make sure that you can adequately carry all the equipment and food you will need for the length of your trip. Here are some rough guidelines on pack size and trip length.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Trip</th>
<th>Volume</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-4 Days</td>
<td>3,500+ cubic inches (57+ liters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-7 Days</td>
<td>4,500+ cubic inches (73+ liters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-10 Days</td>
<td>5,500+ cubic inches (90+ liters)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Buying a Pack** - When you go to the store and try on a pack, the salesperson will help you adjust it and it will feel great. Then she will give you a few sand bags (25-30 pounds/11-13 kilos) to put some weight on. Chances are it will still feel good. The real test is when you get home and try to put even more weight in it. Make sure that the store will take it back after you have tried it at home if it doesn’t feel right. A good rule of thumb is that you should be able to carry no more than 25% of your body weight as your pack weight. So, a 200 lb. person should be able to carry 50 lbs in their pack. This is only a general guideline – how much you can and should carry depends on your needs, your fitness level, the type of pack you have, how long you are out, etc.

**Sizing an Internal Frame Pack** - Packs vary from company to company so check the manufacturer’s specific instructions for both fitting and loading.

The size of your pack is based on the length of your torso, not your height. To measure your torso length you may need the help of a friend. Find the bump of your vertebral column between your shoulder blades. This is your C7 vertebrae. Next, find the top crests of your hip bones and draw an imaginary line between the two crests. Have your friend measure the length from C7 straight down your backbone to this imaginary line – this is your torso length.

Here are some general fitting guidelines.

- First put on the pack and fasten the hip belt to a point where you feel comfortable. The belt is meant to rest on your hip bones to allow your pelvis to carry most of the weight.
- The frame stays should extend two to four inches above your shoulders.
- Once fastened, the hip belt should still have room for adjustment so as to accommodate clothes changes.
- The shoulder straps should follow the contour of your shoulders and join the pack approximately two inches below the top of your shoulders. The position of the shoulder harness can usually be adjusted. The lower ends of the straps should run about five inches below your armpits. On the shoulder straps you will find load lifters which connect to the pack at about ear level and meet the shoulder straps in front of your collarbone.
- The sternum strap should cross your chest below your collarbone. If the framestays are shaped correctly and the pack is properly fitted, you can adjust the load lifters and other fine-tuning straps to make the pack hug your back. Also, adjustments can be made while hiking to divert weight to other muscle groups thus making hiking less tiresome.

If you are at all unsure about the size or fit of your backpack have an expert help you at a local outdoor store. Besides your hiking boots this is one of the most important pieces of equipment you will have and you want to make sure it is a good size and fit.

**Loading Your Pack** - Your gear will form the structure of support for an internal frame pack. For easy, level hiking, a high center of gravity is best. To achieve this, load bulky, light gear (e.g. sleeping bag) low in the pack and stack heavier gear on top of it. For steeper terrain, a lower center of gravity is best because it lessens the chance of falls due to a top-heavy pack. In this case, place heavier items a little lower in the pack and closer to your back than normal. Women may prefer this arrangement under all circumstances. (See Figure below)

### SLEEPING BAGS

Sleeping bags are the best way to keep your body warm in cold conditions. Please learn about the different options available to you and look at the following helpful information.

Why synthetic and not down-fill? Although down-filled sleeping bags provide more warmth and more compressibility for less weight, they cannot be brought on the OA trip. In dry conditions, down sleeping bags are great, however when down becomes wet, it loses its loft and becomes practically useless to warm someone. Because of this, many down sleeping bags are offered with waterproof or water-resistant shells. Synthetic bags do not lose loft when wet. Because your sleeping bags are your last line of defense against the cold, the risk of a wet down bag is too high.

Down: Filled with goose or duck down, down bags have several advantages over synthetics. Down bags provide as much warmth as synthetic bags with less weight and more compressibility. However, down bags are usually much more expensive, and must be cared for properly so as not to lose their loft. They are also difficult to dry and lose insulating power when wet. Newer bags have coated down to reduce wetness and minimize loss of loft (eg. DriDown). *Fill power* is a measure of how warm a down bag will be. Higher numbers mean more loft and better quality down. Typically fill power is a number between 550 and 850. All down bags should have a water-repellant or waterproof finish to prevent loss of loft.
Synthetics: Most synthetic bag insulation today is made from one of two materials: Polarguard 3D or Primaloft. All synthetics will dry quickly, are less expensive and are more durable than goose or duck down. Older synthetic materials used in bags such as Hollofil and Quallofil should be avoided.

What to Look for in a Bag:
Size - Make sure to check out the size of a bag in the store. Most sleeping bags come in regular and long sizes. Those people above 6' tall should check out long sizes. Don't buy a bag that is too big for your body as it will be extra weight to carry and extra space to warm up. To make sure you have the right size, ask the salesperson if you can sit in the bag you are planning to buy in the store.

Bag Shape - Bags come in three basic shapes: Mummy, Semi-rectangular, and Rectangular. We recommend mummy bags for our trips because of the greater warmth they provide, although semi-rectangular bags will do if warm enough. Look for a bag with a hood to provide extra warmth.

- **Mummy**: Mummy bags are tapered for fit, wider at the shoulders and narrower at the feet. This allows you to save warmth while you sleep by decreasing the amount of space your body needs to warm up. Most mummy bags have hoods to provide extra warmth.
- **Semi-rectangular**: These bags are an in-between shape. More tapered than a rectangular bag, but less tapered than a mummy bag, they provide warmth, but do take longer to warm up. Allows more tossing and turning room.
- **Rectangular**: These bags are the least heat-conserving of all the shapes. They also weigh the most and consume the most pack space. We do not recommend bringing this type of bag.

Many manufacturers now provide bags tailored for males and females. Female bags will have more room in the hips and likely more insulation in the torso and footbox. Male bags tend to provide more room in the shoulder area with a slimmer profile in the hip region.

Temperature Rating - This number is an estimate of the minimum outside temperature at which the bag will keep you warm. Keep your metabolism and other sleep factors in mind when deciding what temperature rating is best for you. OA requires 20 degree bags. However, if you get cold easily when you sleep, you may consider getting a warmer bag. Look for a bag 5-10 degrees warmer than the coldest anticipated temperature on your trip. Or, you can add a bag liner to your gear list. Bag liners come in a variety of fabrics and can raise the temp rating of your bag by as much as 10 degrees.

Temperature ratings are guidelines only and vary between manufacturers. Recently many manufactures have started including an EN (European Norm) rating on their bags to standardize temperature ratings between bags and bag makers. There are two important EN temperature ratings to remember – EN comfort rating and an EN lower limit rating. A comfort rating is the temperature which a standard woman can sleep comfortably. The lower limit rating is the temperature which a standard man can sleep comfortably. If included, the EN rating would give a more reliable comparison of temperature ratings between different bags.

Compressibility – Most sleeping bags come with a stuff sack. In the store, stuff the bag into its stuff sack and compare it to other bags. The less space the bag takes up, the easier it will be to pack, but don’t sacrifice warmth for space. Compressible stuff sacks are available as well – they will allow you to compress the sleeping bag down to its smallest packable footprint.

Miscellaneous - Make sure your bag has a hood. A hood is one of the best ways to improve the warmth of your bag. Additionally, you should look for bags with a draft collar and a draft tube along the snag-proof zipper.