

North London Outdoor Group

Fact sheet 4: Equipment Buying Guide.

For your first few weekends, you may be able to borrow equipment. If you do plan to buy anything like boots, waterproofs or a rucksack, this section is intended to help you to get something suitable and to get good value. It is also worth asking other group members what they recommend.

1) Boots.

The purpose of walking boots is to give a good grip, to keep your feet dry and warm and to support your ankles, reducing the risk of an ankle injury on rough ground. They should be a large enough size to allow you to wear one or two pairs of thick socks. These act as padding and help to keep your feet warm in winter.

Lightweight boots are popular and have several advantages. They are usually comfortable and may need little breaking in. It is also easier to walk with less weight on your feet, especially if you are not used to wearing walking boots. However they also have some disadvantages. The soles may wear down more quickly due to shallower tread depth, a "non-clogging" tread pattern with wide spaces or softer rubber compound. Many types have flat soles with no instep which won't take ordinary gaiters. Boots with no instep don't grip well on hard snow.

A basic pair of walking boots. - What to look for.

- a) moulded hard rubber soles. A deep tread pattern (1/4 in. or 6mm) should grip well and wear well.
- b) leather uppers. Leather won't keep your feet completely dry but it should be far better than suede or fabric. Synthetic uppers do not allow feet to "breathe" except Goretex.



A better quality pair of walking boots. - What to look for.

- a) "Vibram" soles. "Vibram" is a brand of sole which is hard wearing and gives good grip on most surfaces. Other brands may not be as hard-wearing as "Vibram".
- b) One-piece leather upper with sewn-in tongue.
- c) Oiled or waxed leather upper with leather lining.

Weight.

Catalogues normally give the weight of a pair of boots, usually for about size 42 (8). A pair of substantial "lightweight" boots for mountain walking may weigh 3 lb 8 oz (1.6kg) or more but some lighter "traditional" boots weigh less than this.

Care of walking boots.

Mud should be washed off as soon as possible. If leather dries out too much, it goes hard and cracks, so boots should never be left to dry in a hot place. Stuff them with balls of newspaper and leave to dry naturally. Leather boots should be treated regularly with "Nikwax" or whatever the manufacturers recommend.

2) Waterproofs.

Some jackets which are sold as "waterproof" are really only "showerproof". For hill walking, you need something that is **really** waterproof and will keep you dry for hours in heavy rain if necessary. Thick warm waterproof jackets are not suitable as your only waterproof jacket for use all the year round because they will be too warm in summer. It is better to have a warm windproof jacket which does not need to be waterproof and a thin waterproof jacket or cagoule to put over it.

Some types of waterproof material are:

- * PU or Neoprene coated Nylon. Woven nylon is strong and light weight but it is *not waterproof by itself* and it *cannot* be made waterproof with any sort of spray. It *must*

have a coating such as Polyurethane (PU) or Neoprene inside. Neoprene is more flexible than PU and lasts longer.

- * PVC. Completely waterproof, but can split easily unless it is thick and heavy.
- * Breathable fabric. (such as Gore-Tex) This reduces condensation inside by allowing water vapour to get out but it is more expensive than PU coated nylon. Gore-Tex is also heavier and bulkier and may not last any longer. There are various other fabrics which claim to let moisture out but may not 'breathe' very well.

Waterproof jacket or cagoule. - What to look for:

- * Hood with cord ties.
- * Strong zip all the way down the front. This can be unzipped for ventilation.
- * Cuffs with elastic or Velcro to keep the wind out.
- * Cord ties at the waist keep the wind out but are not essential if your rucksack has a waist strap.

Waterproof overtrousers. - What to look for:

- * Openings at the ankles, fastened with zips so that you can put them on and take them off easily while wearing walking boots. The zips should have large strong plastic teeth or spiral wound metal teeth. Zips with small individual metal teeth tend to get clogged with grit and break easily.

3) Rucksack.

For day walks you don't need a large rucksack. A 25 litre rucksack is about the minimum for summer, while in winter you'll probably need about 35 litres to allow more space for spare clothing, etc. If you plan to walk between youth hostels with a full pack you'll probably need a 50 - 65 litre rucksack.

Rucksacks. - What to look for.

- * Frame. Even a small rucksack is easier to carry if it is framed.
- * Waterproof PU coated fabric.
- * Wide padded shoulder straps.
- * A waist strap takes some of the weight off your shoulders and helps to prevent the rucksack from throwing you off balance on difficult ground.
- * The main compartment closes with a cord not a zip. With a zip, you can't strap extra clothing, etc. under the flap.

Here are some useful rucksack accessories:

- * Strong, thick plastic rucksack liner bag to keep things dry (dustbin liners don't last long).
- * Spring 'toggle' on cord to save tying and untying it.

4) Torch.

Any small pocket torch would do for finding the way around a youth hostel dormitory in the dark, but if you were walking on footpaths or hills in the dark, you would need a torch with a good beam and a reflector at least 2 inches/50mm across or a powerful LED head torch. The batteries need to last several hours but shouldn't be too heavy. Spare batteries and bulb should also be carried. Wind up torches are also available.

5) Camera protection.

If you carry a camera. it needs to be well protected against getting wet in your rucksack

6) Drink bottle or hydration system.

7) Walking equipment shops in South Herts, North and Central London.

Take your YHA membership card if you have one and your North London Outdoor Group membership card and ask if they will give you a discount.

- **Blacks:** www.blacks.co.uk
- **Cotswold Outdoor Ltd:** www.cotswold-outdoor.com
- **Ellis Brigham Mountain Sports:** www.ellis-brigham.com
- **Field & Trek:** www.fieldandtrek.co.uk
- **John Pollock Ltd:** www.johnpollock.co.uk
- **Mountain Warehouse Ltd:** mountainwarehouse.co.uk
- **Snow & Rock Outdoor Leisure** www.snowandrock.com
- **Nomad Travel:** www.nomadtravel.co.uk

(Version: August 2009,
Group name changed Aug 2018)