

Hiking boots are expensive, you don't wear them all that much and they are the one pair of footwear you can't buy a little bigger to grow into. As a result most of us wait until our feet have "stopped growing" until we invest in a good pair of hiking boots. When do feet stop growing? Feet never stop growing – the bones may stop getting longer but the muscles, tendons and ligaments continue to grow all through our lives. The rate of growth slows down dramatically during adolescence but you'll continue to need to buy bigger shoes for a few years after that i.e. 18 – 24 years of age. Even then you will see a change in the size of your feet if you walk barefoot a lot or in badly supporting shoes or if you gain (or lose) a lot of weight. In any case right now we'd be better to plan our hikes with footwear in mind then expect everyone to go out and buy some hiking boots!

If you were lucky enough to be getting a pair of boots – what would you want? Generally we want your boots to be as light and comfortable as possible while keeping your feet dry, warm and well protected.

Examine your prospective boots carefully – check the stitching, the connection of the sole and upper, the toughness and lug pattern of the sole, the stiffness of the upper and the type and configuration of the lacing.

### **Fitting**

Hiking boots can't be fitted like normal shoes and you certainly shouldn't be able to 'feel your toes' through the leather – choosing hiking boots needs honesty – they might look the business, but any rubbing or pressure and they'll make you look and feel more stupid than if you'd worn a not so cool pair!

- There is a difference in the shape and size of your feet in the morning and your feet after a period of walking or in the evening. Just to be safe try your boots on in the evening or late afternoon preferably having walked for at least 15 minutes beforehand.
- Sounds obvious this one but - wear the socks or sock combination you intend to wear when hiking
- Remove the inner sole and place it against the sole of your feet – the better the outline of the sole of the boot, the better the fit. If a part of your foot extends beyond the sole they'll be too tight – try another size or brand.
- Stick your foot into the open boot with the laces **unfastened**. Stand up straight and push your foot forward into the toes of the boot. You should be able to slip your index finger down between your heel and the inside of the boot. Check the other boot
- Sit down and lace the boots
- Stand up and walk around, they should feel comfortably 'snug' like they are cuddling your feet – there shouldn't be any part of your foot or ankle that feels pressure or rubbing.
- Assure your toes do not touch the front of the boot. If they do go for a bigger size
- Assure your toes don't touch the top of the boot. If they do you need a different style with a higher front.
- As you walk your heel and the heel of the boot should move in harmony. The heel of your foot should not slip up out of the heel (heel-lift). If this happens either you have chosen a boot that is too big or the size and shape of the heel cup do not suit you.