

Outdoor Winter Activities and Sports Tips

Getting Active This Winter

Snowshoeing 101

When the snow gets too deep it makes walking really challenging. This is where snow shoes come into play. They spread your weight over a larger area reducing how much you sink in the snow.

Traditional Vs Modern Snowshoes

Traditional wooden snow shoes are great in deep powder snow due to the size. They are quieter than modern snow shoes making them well suited for hunters and wildlife photographers. They lack traction due to an absence of metal crampons on the bottom. As well, being longer and wider they are more awkward to use requiring an exaggerated wide-stance walk to avoid stepping on your snowshoes.

Modern snow shoes are smaller making them more maneuverable. The deck of the snow shoes is solid rather than mesh so less surface area is needed for the same floatation. They all have some type of metal traction crampon on the bottom for hill climbing and ice. The solid synthetic deck makes them louder, especially on hard pack snow. The narrower width compared to traditional snowshoes allows for a more natural walking motion and easier turning. The mix of metal and synthetic materials amplify sounds making for a lou

Do You Need Heel Lifts?

Another option with modern snow shoes is the addition of a heel lift which can be lifted up to support the heel when climbing. Otherwise you will be on your toes for most of the climb which fatigues the calf muscles and puts stress on the Achilles tendon. If you are in an area that has climbs longer than 500 meters then they can be helpful. If you ever travel to the mountains then they are a must have.

Sizing Snow Shoes

The size of snow shoe you need will be based on your bodyweight and the snow conditions. The chart below gives you recommended sizes based on being in fresh powder snow. If you are on trails that other people use, then you can go a size smaller as it will be more densely packed unless you are the first person on a trail after a heavy snow fall.

Length (inches)	Bodyweight (lbs)	Length (inches)	Bodyweight (lbs)
7 x 18	Up to 80	8 x 27	Up to 160
8 x 21	Up to 120	9 x 29	Up to 180
8 x 24	Up to 140	9 x 29	Up to 180

Footwear for Snowshoeing

The bindings of snow shoes are widely adjustable allowing for a wide variety of footwear to fit. I recommend at least something waterproof like a hiking boot but if it is cold enough out then you will need a warm boot as well. Winter hiking boots that are insulated with a lip on the back that retains the snow shoe heel strap are a great choice.

Make sure to avoid cotton socks as your feet sweat even in the cold. Merino wool or synthetic fleece are the best option for socks to keep your feet warm and dry.

The Right Accessories for Snowshoeing

To make your snow shoeing experience complete you will need a couple of extra things.

Trekking poles with snow baskets will add stability and make it easier to negotiate uneven terrain. Plus, if you have heel lifts on your snow shoes you can raise and lower them with your poles rather than bending down to operate them.

Gaiters are another item that comes in handy to keep your calves and feet warmer plus they help keep snow out of your boots.

How to Snowshoe

For the most part modern snow shoes let you walk on deep snow with nothing more than lifting your feet a little higher to clear the snow. But if you have longer snow shoes attention needs to be paid to turning as it is easy to step on your snow shoe which is the equivalent of tying your shoe laces together. When turning do it as a series of small side steps in the direction you want to go.

Conclusion

Snow shoeing is one of the most easily accessed winter sports as the gear needs are minimal and doesn't require much in the way of new skills. Just strap on your snow shoes and go for a hike.

And unlike cross country skiing, it doesn't matter what the snow conditions are. So if you want to get a great workout this winter and keep hiking, grab a pair of snow shoes and hit the trail.