

Fitting Tips for Mountain Boots

By Jim Winjum

EDITOR'S REMARKS

We've known and worked with Jim Winjum of Kenetrek boots for years! He has been instrumental in helping our members obtain and purchase high quality hunting footwear. Jim is an avid outdoor enthusiast and has harvested a wide variety of big game animals including several species of sheep with a bow! His extensive hunting experience has enabled him to fully understand what we as hunters need and want from our hunting footwear. This combined with his willingness to develop new products to suit hunter's needs has made Kenetrek one of the industry leaders in hunting footwear.

—Jason



JIM WINJUM, KENETREK BOOTS, INC.

Anyone who has hunted in the mountains recognizes how important supportive and proper fitting boots can be. Most mountain hunting guides can tell you horror stories of how a hunter's badly damaged feet ended, or severely impaired, their once-in-a-lifetime hunt. Until you have suffered this pain and agony personally, it is hard to completely understand how important your feet are during a mountain hunt. If your feet fail you, all of the expensive hunting gear you own will be worthless. You can't be successful when you are laid up in camp.

I have assisted thousands of hunters with their footwear needs over the last 20 years and have learned several selection and fitting "tips" that can assist you in finding the perfect, or as close as possible, boot for your next hunt. The reason that I say, "assist" is because personal responsibility with the fit of your boots is essential. Everyone's feet are different and no one brand or style of boot works for all.

The first step in the process is to select the proper style of boot for your hunting needs. Several factors need to be considered:

- 1 The type of terrain you will be hunting in. Sheep hunting in the Chugach Mountains of Alaska may require a different type of boot than a New Mexico antelope hunt.
- 2 The expected temperature range on your hunt. A rut hunt for Alberta Bighorn in November has far different insulation needs than a Desert sheep hunt in Baja, Mexico.
- 3 Required durability for your hunts. The perfect boot for a sheep guide who is guiding six consecutive hunts after a month of scouting is not necessarily the best choice for the hunter going on one hunt. That extra durability that the guide needs often requires a very stiff and much heavier boot.
- 4 Your own personal toughness. Similar to the previous factor, you need to honestly evaluate your physical stamina and how hard you hunt. I know that most of us tend to think we are pretty tough hunters, but most guides I know say the average sheep hunter has only 4 days in them before they are done.

Again, the point here is that you need to select a boot that works for you, which may not be the same as the best boot for your guide. Trust me on this one, everyone usually knows who the hunter is and who the guide is after the first day. Other factors like boot height, boot weight, waterproofness, and breathability may also come into play, but these main factors should help to start your selection process.

When you have determined what style



A BRANNOCK MEASURING DEVICE

of boot you need, finding the best fitting boot is the next step. There are many excellent mountain boots on the market today. They all are constructed differently and are built on different lasts, therefore each style of boot will tend to fit differently as well. It is important to try the boots on first. I recommend trying on several styles from different manufacturers to find the best fit for your feet.

You should try to have your feet measured using a Brannock measuring device. The Brannock will measure your overall foot length, length of your arch, and foot width. Make sure that you have both feet measured as most people have a slight difference. If there is a size difference between your feet, you should fit the larger foot.

With your size measurements determined, it is important that you check both feet for adequate toe length by sitting in a chair and putting the boot on but leaving it unlaced. Then slide your foot forward until any part of your toes just touch the end. Don't smash them forward - just make



CHECK FOR PROPER LENGTH

light contact. Then check for at least a good finger's width behind your heel. This assures when the boots are laced snug, you will have adequate toe room in front of your toes - vital when going downhill with weight on your back.

Once you have verified that you have selected the proper boot size, the volume of the boot can be addressed. You want your mountain boots to fit snug with no pinch points or pressure points. The boot volume can be adjusted somewhat by changing the thickness of your sock or sock combination. Most people prefer to use some type of wicking liner sock with a fitted boot sock over the top. It is important to utilize a wool blend that wicks foot perspiration away and insulates when damp. Avoid cotton as it holds moisture against the skin and takes too long to dry. There are many excellent wool blend socks today with a variety of thicknesses to choose from. My personal favorites are made by Bridgedale and Lorpen. Some hunters will try to put on a thicker sock



KENETREK MOUNTAIN BOOTS

when the weather is colder for additional warmth. This usually makes the boot fit too tight which actually makes your feet colder by compressing the boot insulation and reducing circulation in your feet. I recommend finding the best fitting sock combination for your boots and always using the same sock system with those boots no matter what the temperature is.

The fit and performance of your boots can also be enhanced with a performance footbed. Two of my favorites are the Superfeet insoles and the heat moldable custom footbeds from Sole. They both have strong arch supports that help keep your arches from collapsing. That can be really important after a long day walking on rocks with a backpack on. They also

have pronounced heel cups to eliminate heel movement and blisters, especially when side-hilling. Beware of soft gel type footbeds. They provide excellent cushioning on flat surfaces, but will not provide the necessary foot support needed for uneven rocky terrain.

By investing some effort into your boot selection and fitting process, you'll be able to determine a personal "recipe" for a mountain boot system that provides the very best combination of support and comfort possible. This new boot system will certainly be invaluable on your next rigorous mountain hunt, but you also may find it to be so comfortable that you use it for all your outdoor adventures. Good luck and happy hunting!

