

Footwear for Winter Hiking

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Why not just wear three-season boots with warmer socks?

- ▶ Much colder temperatures in winter require robust insulation and temp. ratings:
 - ▶ Winter boots rated to -20 degrees F. (200 grams insulation) will generally keep your feet warm down to about +10 to +20 degrees F.
 - ▶ Winter boots rated to -40 degrees F. (400 grams insulation) will generally keep your feet warm down to somewhere around 0 degrees F. (when active)
- ▶ Wet snow and/or slush require robust waterproofness
- ▶ Different grip challenges (ice and hard-packed snow)
- ▶ Winter hiking boots must be compatible with microspikes, snowshoes, and/or crampons

General options for winter footwear

- ▶ General-purpose winter pac boots with removable liners
- ▶ Heavy-duty general-purpose winter boots (often work fine for hiking)
- ▶ (More-or-less) dedicated winter hiking boots
- ▶ ~~Plastic mountaineering boots~~

General-purpose pac boots

(great for shoveling your driveway or walking your dog...)



Sorel Caribou-app. \$160



Kamik NationPro-app. \$95



L.L. Bean Snow Boot-app. \$160

Pros and cons of pac boots

Pros

- ▶ Often less expensive than other winter boots of equal warmth
- ▶ Generally very warm (rated to -40-degrees f.)
- ▶ Generally very waterproof
- ▶ In an unheated cabin, keeping the removable boot liners in your sleeping bag with you overnight should prevent the wet liners from freezing

Cons

- ▶ While great for shoveling the driveway, rarely provide adequate ankle or arch support for hiking
- ▶ No protective shank underfoot
- ▶ Uppers can be too soft to allow crampons and/or snowshoes to be snugged down securely
- ▶ May not have adequate traction for more demanding trail conditions in the mountains
- ▶ May not be available in half sizes

Heavy-duty general-purpose winter boots (often work fine for hiking)



Sorel Conquest-app. \$160



The North Face Men's or Women's Chilcat 400-app. \$150



Columbia Bugaboot II-app. \$110

Pros and cons of heavy-duty non-hiking specific winter boots

Pros

- ▶ Typically less expensive than dedicated winter hiking boots
- ▶ Can be purchased with a variety of temperature ratings (-20, -40, or -60 degrees F.)
- ▶ Generally provide adequate support
- ▶ Typically have full-length shanks to protect the soles of your feet underfoot and support traction devices
- ▶ Good winter traction
- ▶ Typically very waterproof

Cons

- ▶ Can be a bit heavy and/or clunky for hiking
- ▶ Fit may not be comfortable for everyone to hike in

(More or less) hiking-specific winter hiking boots



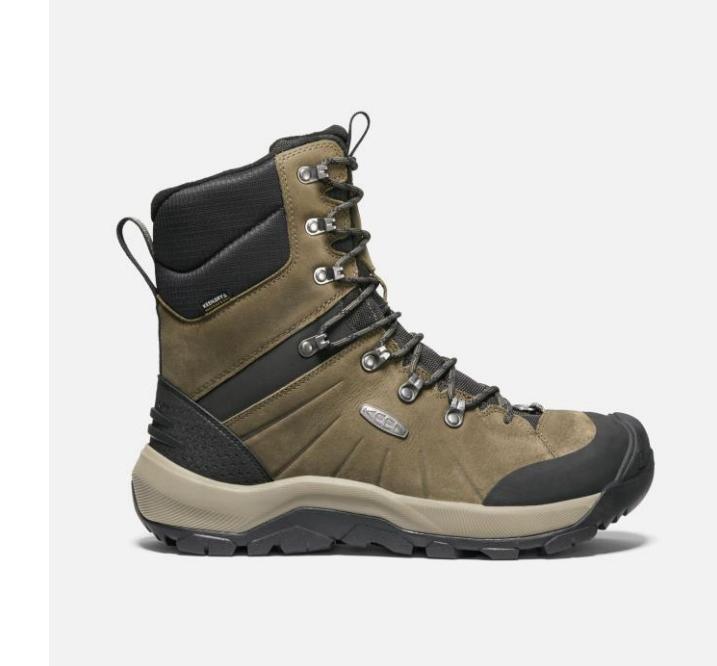
Oboz (Men's) Bridger 10-Inch
Insulated Waterproof-app. \$200



Merrell Thermo Overlook 2 Tall-app. \$180



Salomon Toundra Pro
app. \$200



Keen Revel IV High Polar Boot
- app. \$200



Oboz (Women's) Bridger 9-inch
Insulated Waterproof-app. \$200

Pros and cons of dedicated winter hiking boots

Pros

- ▶ New models have become available in recent years
- ▶ Combine the support of good three-season hiking boots with adequate insulation and waterproofness for winter hiking
- ▶ Lacing system *may* provide adequate adjustability for hiking
- ▶ Upgraded insole *may* provide adequate arch support and footbed
- ▶ Some models also promise winter-specific traction

Cons

- ▶ Typically more expensive than either pac boots or heavy-duty non-hiking specific winter boots
- ▶ May not be available in wider sizes or in women-specific models

Additional considerations

- ▶ As with three-season boots, *fit is critical*. Boots should:
 - ▶ not pinch anywhere
 - ▶ have plenty of room in the toe box, but with minimal heel lift
 - ▶ accommodate good wool hiking socks (bring your own socks when trying on boots)
- ▶ Winter boots rated to -20 degrees F. (200 g. insulation) will generally keep your feet warm down to about +10 to +20 degrees F.
- ▶ Winter boots rated to -40 degrees F. (400 g. insulation) will generally keep your feet warm down to somewhere around 0 degrees F. (when active)
- ▶ Note that, as with sleeping bags, these are the manufacturers own ratings, not industry-standard ratings

More additional considerations...

- ▶ If you have problem feet, you may need winter boots with removable footbeds to allow you to insert your own off-the-shelf or custom orthotics
- ▶ As with three-season hiking boots, it's important to go on several local hikes with your new boots to identify any fit problems in advance and break them in adequately *before* you head into the mountains
- ▶ Gore-Tex linings or not, most boots used for winter hiking will eventually require some waterproofing
- ▶ You may have to get creative when sourcing your winter hiking boots this year. Start with reputable local outdoor shops like REI, EMS, and LL Bean and then expand your search outward from there if needed
- ▶ It may take several seasons to finally zero in on the winter hiking boots that work best for you

Questions???

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