BOOTS FOR MANTRAILING

Choosing the right pair of human boots for Mantrailing can make a big difference to your comfort and safety but the range of options can sometimes be a bit daunting.

In Mantrailing, human feet are both your brakes and stability control so good footwear is crucial. Generally, I would recommend a pair of boots that have a stiff sole and good ankle support. The stiff sole allows you to stand and balance with safety and confidence, whilst the ankle support holds everything in place, protecting and stabilising the foot and lower leg. They need to be comfortable whilst keeping your feet cool and dry.

Get your feet measured



A vital thing is to get your feet accurately measured - a good store will insist on doing this before they even show you boots. This is not just about the length but also the overall shape, taking into account things like the width of your heel, the height of your arches or the flexibility of your toes. Only when you know all of these things can you combine them to make an accurate judgement about what size you need. Individual makes also vary in fit so don't assume that size 12 of Make A will fit you equally as well as Make B.

Which material is the best?

Modern outdoor boots largely fall into three categories: leather, synthetic or leather/synthetic mix.

As always, the first thing to prioritise is the fit, which means that as long as it is strong and comfortable enough for Mantrailing, the only boot to choose is the one that fits correctly.

Leather boots have a reputation for needing to be 'broken in'. This may have been true in the past, but modern leather boots are usually as comfortable 'out of the box' as synthetic options. Thus, the only real difference is in weight and care.

Leather boots may be slightly heavier and they may last longer, but this is only true if you care for them correctly. After each use, they need to be washed with an occasional reproofing and conditioning.

Synthetic options also need care but, generally speaking, they can take more abuse as the materials are less prone to dry out and crack.

Leather/synthetic mixes try to combine the benefits of both materials in one boot and may be an attractive option.

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Are they waterproof?



The vast majority of modern walking boots will be waterproof; this is because of a sock-like lining built into the boot. **GORE-TEX®** lined walking boots are by far the best known, but there are multiple high quality options widely available.

The advantage of boots with a waterproof membrane is that they can be used in many weather conditions, including when it is dry. This is because of something called 'breathability', which allows sweat vapour to escape. This is why you can walk for miles and when you take off your boot, your foot is not dripping wet and covered in blisters.

Don't forget socks!

Whether you choose to wear one or two pairs, prefer them thick or thin, up to the knees or around the ankles, socks are in many respects the unsung heroes of footwear performance.

Socks should not be an afterthought but rather a central part of your overall footwear. They need to resist the friction, avoid bunching, not give you blisters, provide padding and, above all else, wick sweat away from the skin and pass it out to the breathable membrane. There are many breathable options available at outdoor retailers but the important thing is to wear a specifically designed walking sock rather than an everyday, leisure or sports sock.

What about boots for dogs?

Dogs don't usually need boots for Mantrailing here in the UK. Their pads are designed for all terrain grip so putting them in boots will actually reduce their effectiveness by preventing the metatarsals in each paw from operating individually, similar to the individual suspension on a 4x4. By checking your dog's paws regularly and inspecting the surface over which you are working, you will ensure the pads stay in good condition and avoid the need for boots. This is a good resource for pad care advice:

http://www.lowchensaustralia.com/grooming/nailconditions2.htm



However, there are possible exceptions. After all, sled dogs in Alaska nowadays wear boots due to the snow and ice. Some search and rescue or CSI fire brigade dogs that work in areas where there may be physical dangers like sharp metal, broken glass and spilt chemicals wear protective boots too. In Mantrailing, it is possible you may have to work over tarmac or similar surfaces in hot weather, so protection for the paws can be a good precaution in these cases.

Dogs tolerate boots better the earlier they are introduced to them. So, if you think you'll want your dog to wear boots, get them used to them from an early age otherwise, the first time they put them on, you may well witness some odd behaviour as they try to get them off or try to learn how to walk again.

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