

Team Ascent: Guidance notes:

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Boots, Gaiters, Crampons, Rock shoes, Insurance

BOOTS:

The type of trip you are doing with us will affect your boot choice. In all cases it's important that your boots are comfortable, worn in and water resistant. For those of you coming on snow courses and mountaineering, it's important that your boots are in good condition and water proofed and keep your feet warm.

Boots are basically in three categories and examples are:

B1: Scarpa Concordia (These are walking boots and suitable for long treks such as haute route summer).

B2: Scarpa Manta (these are suitable for our classic type courses)

B3: Leather Sportiva Nepal Tops/ Extreme, Trango/ Trango ice. Makalu, Scarpa Matterhorn, Scarpa Cerro Torre and so on.

B3: Plastic Koflach, Asolo, Scarpa Vega

For technical Alpine climbing a B3 boot is most suitable, as its rigid sole will give support especially when front pointing with crampons. These tend to be heavier boots and many have a "thinsulate" liner, which makes them warmer, and are therefore suitable for Mont Blanc ascents. Many of our guides use these all the time, rather than buying and having to travel with several different pairs of boots. A typical example is Sportiva Nepal extreme. They come in Ladies model (greenish colour) and a Mans model; (yellow colour). For pure ice climbing in cold conditions plastic boots are more waterproof and tend to be warmer and slightly clumsier to walk/climb in. So for summer most people seem to prefer the leather boots. For cold or wet winter conditions the plastic versions are warmer and less likely to let water in. For High altitude conditions Sportiva Mons/ Scarpa Phantom 6000 – 8000 models or equivalent makes are suitable.

For summer skills and classic alpine climbing a B2 boot is OK. They are more comfortable and lighter and sturdy enough, but if you feel that you want to go higher or climb more technical mountaineering routes then a B3 would be a better buy.

For walks such as a summer haute route a B2 boot is OK or even a top quality B1 boot (which tends to be lighter, cooler and more comfortable). But if you intend to progress to more technical climbing then a B2 or B3 boot would be a good investment.

The condition of the soles of your boots is important, a good edge on the sole of the boot helps in securing a good foot placement in the snow. The traditional Vibram pattern sole is an advantage on colder snow covered areas where extra warmth is required. A good edge on the sole also assists in rock climbing. B3 Boots are ideal for C3 Crampons and will also take C2 and C1 crampons. While a B1 boot will only accept a C1 crampon.

Leather or Plastic boots;

:Most guides tend to use B3 leather boots in the summer and as technology advances these boots are now also used in winter ice climbing. For winter climbing or high altitude these newer models tend to have an insulated lining and an integral insulated gaiter. Some guides do wear plastic boots and there is no doubt that they are warmer, and great for the colder days on Mont Blanc and in Scottish Winter where on the approach walk you will be walking through bogs and mud where its important that feet are kept dry for later in the day when you get higher up the mountain and encounter freezing temperatures. However, again boot technology and design have led to vast improvements in the warmth and weight of technical winter climbing boots, and while these “newer” designs are taking over, the plastic boots are incredibly tough and hence reliable in cold conditions. Also most plastic boots have a separate removable liner, which can be kept on when staying overnight in mountain huts and bivouacs and can be dried slightly easier. The newer lightweight boots are less clumsy than plastic boots which is excellent for technical climbs. They are also quite expensive, and the external fabrics can be damaged more easily by rock edges when used in scree, mud and boulder fields.

Gaiters:

Gaiters are incredibly important, they come in various sizes, and the basic idea is to stop small bits of debris such as snow, chips of ice, heather and small stones from falling inside your boots, they also assist in keeping out water and also cover the laces hence reducing tripping hazards. They do protect the boot somewhat and a good wel- fitting gaiters can also add warmth. Non-breathable fabric types can build up perspiration. The longer gaiters are good in deep snow and where there are no trails to follow. For Alpine summer the shorter ones are more commonly used.

Even when over trousers have built in gaiter type designs it is always a good idea to wear a short gaiter, unless, you have the most modern boots which have gaiters as an integral part of the design.

Crampons:

When choosing crampons its important to get a crampon which will fit your boot. If possible take your boots to the shop and ensure they are compatible. Ideally the downward facing spikes should match the sole of your boot. . The front points should protrude around 3 cms from the toe of your boot.

Again there have been some innovative design advances in crampons however generally a 12-point mountaineering crampon is the most versatile for mountaineering and climbing. (Charlet Moser/ Petzl super 12, Grivel, new Classic, Black Diamond)

Most of our clients soon progress beyond ten point crampons.

For technical ice climbing (ice falls) a rigid crampon is useful. But they are specific to purpose and not really suitable for mountaineering.

Mono points are increasing in popularity and are handy for extreme icefall climbing and very hard mixed climbing/dry tooling.

Light weight and 10 point crampons are use full for ski-touring and for routes where you take crampon just in case but are really un-likely to use them. The lightweight alloy crampons do not penetrate hard ice very well as they blunt very quickly. Also the spikes and points break quite easily.

Anti-balling plates:

These rubber or plasticized plates fit on to the underside of your crampons and they are an aid to preventing snow from sticking to your crampon. The snow can build up to large ball or chunk, which prevents the spikes from penetrating the ice. This trapped ball of consolidated snow can cause sliding and tripping. Its really annoying and potentially dangerous when this happens, so anti balling plates are a sensible and prudent purchase.

Rock shoes:

These are special smooth rubber soled shoes designed for technical rock climbing outdoors and for indoor climbing walls. They are essential for technical courses and if you own a pair you should bring them along for any of our climbing courses. (They are not essential for ski trips and Mont Blanc courses or our walking holidays). If you do not own any, then do not worry, as we have some spare pairs available and they are usually readily available for hire. If you do decide to buy your own, do not let the shops sell you something over technical, which can be too tight and uncomfortable. They should be reasonably comfortable, snug fitting with a very thin sock. The comfort factor is critical on longer rock climbs. Meaning that rock boots, which are to small can, restrict your movement and circulation, which often leads to pain and discomfort and potentially damaging foot problems. If the shoes are too big, they may roll off small footholds making the climb feel harder and may also cause heel blisters.

Insurance:

You are strongly advised to have insurance cover for all activities with Team Ascent Ltd. This should at the very least cover mountain rescue and medical costs. Having cancellation, emergency evacaion and repatriation cover is also prudent. (This also applies to ski activities both off and on piste)

For mountaineering activities outside the UK. (Europe, ie. France, Switzerland Italy etc and further a field). You **must have insurance cover**. This cover is not normally covered by normal holiday travel insurance.

Full mountaineering cover is available from organisations such as:

British Mountaineering Council (BMC):

Telephone: +44(0)161 445 4747. www.thebmc.co.uk

Snowcard:

Telephone: +44(0)161445 4747, www.snowcard.co.uk

Non UK residents may be able to get suitable cover in their own country and may be able to obtain automatic cover for rescue and medical costs (resulting from an accident) by joining the **Austrian Alpine Club**.

Telephone +44(0)1707 324835, www.aacuk.org.uk

There are other organisations providing such cover.