

Danner Boots

Much as I love Vasque boots, they're not what I use on trails. Three years of sloggng up a local mountain before dawn twice a week with a heavy pack convinced me that lightweight trail running shoes are the footwear of choice for trail use. (I came to prefer Nike's Air Terra series, the best being the now-discontinued Alibris.)

But the joy is going off-trail, and for that, calf-high hunters' boots are the best, though largely eschewed by backpacker aesthetic. High boots with Goretex linings let you wade through significant water and bash through thick brush with aplomb. Ankle anxiety disappears. The premium brand is Danner. For summer I like the Whitney, which achieves light weight with Cordura everywhere except heel and toe. My winter boot is the SUV of boots, the Danner Fort Lewis, 11 inches high, all leather, with Thinsulate insulation. It's a go-anywhere boot, not as heavy as it looks. Find a local hunters' supply store to get the best fit, or use a hunters' catalog like Cabela's or Danner's direct.

—SB



69110 Fort Lewis, Insulated 200 gram



52000 Whitney 8" Uninsulated

Danner Boots

52000 Whitney 8" Uninsulated
\$220
69110 Fort Lewis Insulated 200 Gram
\$250

Danner Shoe Mfg. Co.
800/345-0430
www.danner.com
or
Cabela's
800/237-4444
www.cabelas.com

Skillers Duckweave Pants

"These pants are made for working, and that's just what they'll do," it says in the catalog, and that is no shit. These pants are vastly sturdier, longer-lasting, more comfortable and beautiful than jeans. They have pockets below the knee that accommodate their custom-fitted light-weight kneeling pads. Those pads alone are worth the \$60 price. I never realized how often around the house, tractor, and woods, I found myself holding my body at an uncomfortable, back-stressing angle until I had these pants that made kneeling easy and restful. They have pull-out pouches for nails or screws that are reverse slashed so you can get into them with either hand. In a marvelous example of intelligent design, these hang outside—unless, if they're not full, you want to tuck them inside the regular front pockets. An array of other pockets can hold everything from a cell phone to a wrench. They're the ultimate cargo pants.

A word of caution: I had to send my first pair back because I was fantasizing about my waist size, using the size from my last pair of jeans. These pants are brutally honest, and they want to fit up around your belly button, which is a problem if you no longer have as much of a waist as you did when you were 23, but like to think you do. So don't suck it in. Stand like you will be when you're holding a chain saw and when in doubt, buy one size larger. You can always burn the tag.

The final kick is that these pants blow away the straights, should you choose to wear them in on casual Friday. When I got my first pair as a present, my daughter, The Coolest Woman in the Northern Piedmont, said enviously, "Daddy, you're having a very butch Christmas." Women in the office cooed and agreed.

For the full package, you want to add White's Boots (the ones you want are the Logger - Smoke Jumper model), a Leatherman in a small leather carrying cases, a Mini Maglite flashlight (it's amazing how often you'll use it) in a black web carrier, and a belt custom-made by your local leather crafter to properly display your Cold War victory trophy of a Red Army belt buckle.



For this and other extraordinarily desirable gear, go to my favorite wish book, the Duluth Trading Co. catalog.

—Joel Garreau

Skillers Duckweave Pants

\$59
Duluth Trading Co
8300 Highland Drive
Wausau, WI 54401
www.duluthtrading.com, 800/505-8888

Mephisto Shoes

French and expensive, Mephistos are what walking sneakers should be: good looking, hard wearing, and very comfortable. I wear the basic black model all the time, so much that I now take advantage of Mephisto's offer to resole their shoes indefinitely. Since the shoes are leather, they adapt to your peculiar foot (such as my bunions), and they're robust enough to carry on for many years with occasionally refreshed soles. I own two pair, so one is working while the other is in the shop.

—SB



Mephisto Shoes

About \$200, from places like
<http://www.mephistogreatlakes.com/>
or
<http://www.handeshoe.com/>

Nike Air Mocs

The clog's promise of being an all-terrain slipper is a failed promise. Clogs are heavy, clunky, and fall off under duress. Air Mocs do all the things clogs are supposed to do, and they are the most comfortable shoes I've ever worn. Nike describes them as light hiking shoes, while Cabela's catalog positions them as camp moccasins. I've used them happily in both roles, and as long-distance driving shoes and for office wear. I bought two pair out of fear that Nike would discontinue them. They have no laces, just a pinch-clamp ankle string. Their cushioning layer makes them warm in a chilly camp, but they don't sweat in warm weather. The tread is light but rugged, the Nike swoosh relatively hidden, the look understated. Foot luxury.

—SB



Nike Air Moc

Nike style#
175035, \$65
800-806-6453;
www.nike.com