

## GEAR REVIEW BY LISA MALONEY



### **If you like softer boots: Wolverine Black Ledge (\$90)**

I love Wolverine Black Ledge boots because they do a good job of protecting your feet (which is the whole point of wearing a boot, right?) but the midsole and upper both have shoe-level flexibility, so you can still feel what's going on underfoot. This type of boot isn't for everybody, but if your feet are strong and stable enough to hike in running shoes, try these out for extra warmth, waterproofing and protection.

Experience (and the death of many of a light boot) tells me that this flexibility often leads to failure of the waterproof/breathable liner, but my Black Ledges are still waterproof after two years of abuse -- and they're a crazy good deal, too. Make sure you don't buy the steel-toed version by mistake.



### **When shoes just won't do: Keen Newport H2 (\$100)**

A confession: My feet hate being cooped up in boots or shoes when it's warm out, so I hike in sandals or water shoes whenever possible. The wisdom of this is debatable, but it has some perks: I don't have to carry extra footwear for water crossings, and high-end water shoes usually give good traction, especially on wet surfaces. And when I wear heavy wool socks under my sandals? That's Alaska style.

Case in point, the Keen Newport H2 has survived more than a year of hiking and even has a solid capped toe to protect you from pop-up tree roots and rocks. Their one weak point is the speed laces, which I've already worn through once. (A product called Lock Laces works great for replacing this sort of speed-lace system.)

*Alaska asks a lot of hiking footwear: It should be stable enough to handle uneven terrain from tundra hummocks to loose scree, waterproof enough to keep your feet dry on a slog through wet tundra, but light and flexible enough that you don't cringe at the thought of putting them on. And, of course, it has to fit. Fortunately, there are a few models that are up to the test. Check out my list of favorites based on hands-on abuse:*



### **Long-lasting backpacking boots: Asolo Stynger/Fugitive GTX (\$235)**

If you like boots that are stiff enough to support almost any load over the gnarliest terrain, check out the Asolo Stynger GTX (gents, your version is the Fugitive GTX). A sole that's shaped to encourage a natural stride helps these beefy boots feel light underfoot, and they offer great waterproofing and overall foot protection. Better yet, the Stynger stands up to an awful lot of abuse (you know, the fun stuff).

The shape of the Stynger accommodates a wide variety of feet, including my very wide "duck feet," although if you have extremely high-volume arches like I do, you'll need to fuss with the insoles.



### **Light hiking/running shoes: Icebug Anima4 RB9X (\$160)**

I'm really digging this lightweight Icebug shoe. It's actually a trail runner, but that translates to great performance on hiking trails too, as long as you have strong feet and ankles that don't need a lot of exterior support. The studless RBX9 outsole and aggressive lugs give excellent traction everywhere, especially on slick mud and wet rocks; and extra eyelets make it easy to eliminate heel rub.

Most Icebug shoes are built for narrow to normal-width feet, but the Anima will accommodate a reasonably wide foot and even has room for high arches. A little light, closed-cell foam padding feels nice and cushy but won't soak up a lot of water.



### **For you narrow-footed folks: Scarpa Kailash GTX (\$209)**

All right, I couldn't actually test this boot ... my super-wide feet wouldn't even fit into it! But I was impressed with the construction, and hikers with narrow feet absolutely love it. This is a serious, heavy-duty boot for serious trails or backpacking, but has just enough flex in the sole to keep it from feeling like you're clomping along in mountaineering boots.