

315 PRODUCTS TESTED



# Outside BUYER'S GUIDE

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SUMMER 2010

## THE YEAR'S BEST GEAR

Daypacks  
Hiking Shoes  
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Mountain Bikes  
Sleeping Bags  
Watches & More

PLUS: THE  
COOLEST  
NEW TOOLS  
AND TECH

← New  
Balance's  
905 running  
shoe

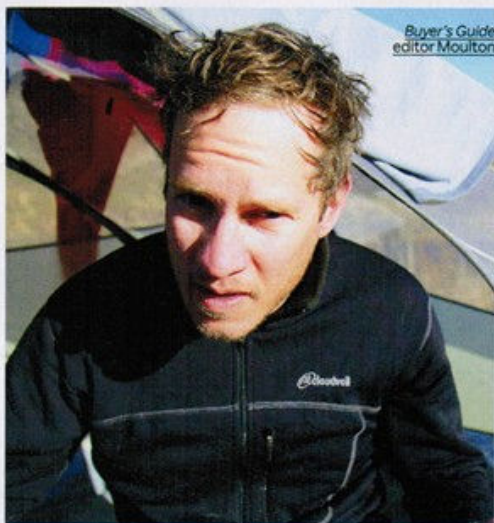


DISPLAY UNTIL OCTOBER 5  
\$6.95





# BETWEEN THE LINES



Buyer's Guide editor Moulton

## The Rating Game

We spend a lot of time here discussing how to craft the most helpful product reviews we can. Hence, heated conversations about whether or not there's a more elegant way to say "gusseted crotch" (there isn't) and spiraling e-mail chains about whether anyone really cares if a kayak has been roto- or blow-molded (consensus: they don't). But the biggest debate recently has been whether or not we should once again numerically rate products in specific areas of performance. Some of us liked the idea: It'll help readers zero in on a product's strengths! It'll make the pages more browsable! And some of us didn't: We're not always comparing apples to apples! They'll be misleading! Well, the yeas carried the day—and then the hard work

really began. Some ratings were easy to calculate. The warmth-to-weight rating of a sleeping bag, for example, is just a representation of the bag's degree rating vs. its weight. John Bradley, who directed our road- and mountain-bike tests, simply extrapolated figures from his remarkably detailed Excel spreadsheet. Determining the breathability ratings for soft shells involved less math and more mid-hike jacket switches. Now that reviewers have finally stopped e-mailing me about bumping a particular product's rating up or down a few decimal points, I think it was an informative exercise. More important, I hope you do, too. —SAM MOULTON

### 1. FREDERICK REIMERS

To test the livability of tents, Reimers invited trip-mates into every tent to play spades, then repeatedly asked them things like "How's your headroom?"

### 2. JULIA FULLERTON

When not designing the OBG, Fullerton was busy working on her stationery line, at paperjules.com.

### 3. JOE SPRING

Gear videos. Behind-the-scenes footage. Web galleries. Tweets. Facebook

posts. News. Our talented and hardworking online editor manages our digital-and-social-media empire.

### 4. FRANK SOTOMAYOR

Sotomayor, owner of Santa Fe's Frankie Flats Bicycle Repair shop, is our behind-the-scenes bike guru and mechanic.

### 5. MARK ANDERS

Surfboard tester Anders recently went on a 16-day recon trip in southeastern China. His account and photos of the trip will be featured in the next issue of *The Surfer's Journal*.

### 6. INGA HENDRICKSON

OBG photographer Hendrickson can make even the dorkiest of hiking shoes look cool.

### 7. JASON STEVENSON

Stevenson tested trail shoes. His first book, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Backpacking and Hiking* (Alpha), came out in April.

### 8. CHRISTINA ERB

When not scaling boulders and buildings in Jackson, Wyoming, Erb reviewed women's climbing gear.

### 9. BILL DUGGAN

Duggan—a.k.a. the Sharkman—tested bike accessories. He and his son-in-law, OBG editor Sam Moulton, are signed up for this year's Iron Horse Classic, a 50-mile race from Durango to Silverton, Colorado.

### 10. BERNIE BROUDY

Broudy, who also reviewed boats, broke three pairs of mountain-bike shoes while testing the latest women's bikes and accessories.

### 11. JEREMY SPENCER

OBG senior editor Spencer





## Trail Shoes

Huge, heavy boots are a thing of the past. If your normal routine involves short outings, mellower trails, or lightweight packs, steer toward low-cut, breathable, flexible trail shoes. If stuffed packs, over-nighters, or craggy summits are more your style, consider stiffer trail shoes or boots with taller, more supportive ankle collars. For off-trail or rocky terrain, look for iron-

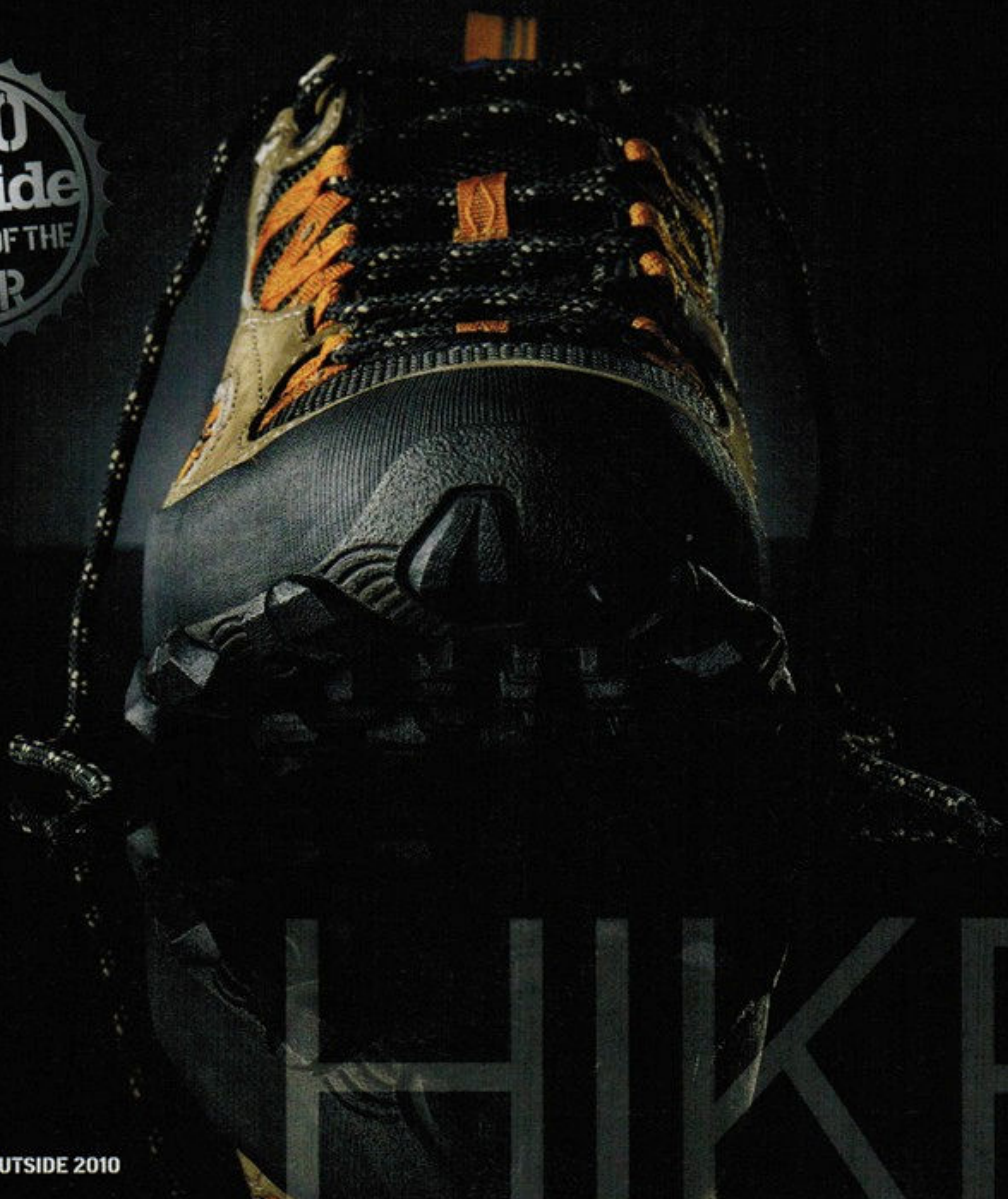
clad uppers made from materials like synthetic or full-grain leather. ¶ Can't tell if a shoe is designed for day hiking or backpacking? Do the flex test by grasping the toe and heel and bending them together. The stiffer the sole, the better it is for heavy loads and tricky terrain. ¶ Do you really need a waterproof shoe? That depends. If you live in the Northwest or New England,

or often hike wet and muddy trails, then yes. But if you live in the Southwest or the Rockies, and are rarely out for more than a few hours, a waterproof shoe is probably overkill. BY JASON STEVENSON

AND THE WINNER IS... **Patagonia Drifter A/C** \$110 As this year's test began to wind down, one fact became glaringly apparent: The

Drifter had accumulated the most mileage. It excelled on 90 percent of our trail adventures—from mellow afternoon outings to weekend backpack trips (with loads up to 25 pounds) and every ramble in between. Stiff sole to push up steep ascents? Check. A toothy Vibram tread that stuck to everything from loose scree to slick rocks? Yup. The break-in period

was (almost) instantaneous, thanks in large part to generous ankle and heel padding. And throughout it all, dry feet. The "A/C" stands for *air-conditioned*, and the breathable fabric panels lived up to their billing. Note: If you most often hike in soggy climes, consider the waterproof Gore-Tex version (\$140). 16.8 oz; [patagonia.com](http://patagonia.com)  
**Support: 4.5 (out of 5)**  
**Comfort: 5**







## Trail Shoes

### The Weekender

#### Merrell Col Mid WTP \$145

"This is the Chuck Norris of hiking shoes!" proclaimed one tester. Even if we couldn't see the resemblance, we certainly agree that the Col packs an impressive punch. Bolstered by a waterproof liner, the mostly full-grain leather upper—the toughest breathable material—proved itself on weekend after weekend of wet slogs in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Rustproof metal grommets let you really crank down the laces for a responsive fit, and Vibram's deeply lugged dual-density outsole—a firm edge for stability and a soft centerline for grip—kept the boot steady during rough, slippery descents under 40-pound packs. Sweaty feet, beware: This boot gets hot. 16.9 oz; merrell.com

**Support: 4.6**  
**Comfort: 3.6**

### Long Haulers

#### Timberland Washington Summit F/L GTX Mid \$165

Of all the full-on backpacking boots we tested this year, none was as comfy as Timberland's Washington Summit. While it's tall and rigid enough to handle loads north of 45 pounds, even our most blister-prone tester, who normally avoids big boots like giardia, was wooed by its athletic-shoe feel on the trail. The waterproof Gore-Tex liner held up superbly during a high-water weekend in Shenandoah National Park, and when twilight came with a mile of wobbly switchbacks to go, the padded collar prevented several twisted ankles. Note: While the boot is lighter than it looks, the nylon panels aren't armored enough to withstand regular off-trail bushwhacking. 20.8 oz; timberland.com

**Support: 4.8**  
**Comfort: 3.8**

### Mud Control

#### Ahnu Moraga OXT \$110

Tromping through sludgy puddles on the Appalachian Trail, the Moraga's combination of a waterproof upper and snug-fitting gusseted tongue easily kept slop at bay. That was to be expected. What really impressed us was its bite. The Moraga's toothy outsole shed the glop and provided plenty of stability and grip, whether you're rock-hopping streams or, like one tester, overland trekking in Tanzania. And because they're respectably light, testers were just as apt to grab them when heading out on drier, less technical trails. Although we don't have any major concerns about the overall durability of the shoe, we did notice frayed toe stitching after three weeks of abusive testing. 16.5 oz; ahnufootwear.com

**Support: 4.1**  
**Comfort: 4.8**

### Sock Up

The problem: Synthetic fabrics (polyester, nylon, etc.) are great at wicking sweat but can get stinky; natural fibers (like merino wool) are usually more comfortable and odor-resistant, but are far less durable. One solution? Blend them! Each merino-wool fiber in Bridgedale's hiking socks is wrapped in a synthetic sheath, which improves strength and wicking speed; our favorite is the Ventum Light Hiker (\$19; bridgedale.com). Point6 bolsters the wool of its incredibly comfortable Outdoor Tech Medium

To ensure breathability in wet conditions, apply a **durable water-repellent (DWR)** finish to the exterior of the shoe's upper (like the Vibram's) to the exterior of both waterproof and non-waterproof hiking shoes.

Crew by compacting more fiber into each yarn, making them 20 percent stronger than conventional merino threads, then knitting them onto a tough nylon-and-Lycra skeleton (\$20; point6.com). For humid treks and runs, Lorpen's TCXS Tri-Layer Light Hiker (\$15; lorpen.com) sandwiches a soft, natural fabric (Tencel) between a layer of fast-wicking CoolMax on the skin and a tough nylon shell that protects the sock from abrasion. The verdict? An absolute moisture-control champ. —JUSTIN NYBERG



# HIKE

## A Stiff and Stout Day Hiker

### Oboz Contour \$110

Some light hikers feel comfy at first, only to prove mushy after several weeks of testing. All the more reason to appreciate the up-front honesty of Oboz's superstiff Contour. Sure, break-in time is longer, but that extra rigidity translated to a secure and stable fit and feel after months of pounding up and down the rocky AT ridge trails in Pennsylvania. A bootielike cuff keeps trail debris out, and blisters were never a concern due to the richly cushioned insole. Bonus: The carbon-rubber tread smeared well on both wet and dry scrambles. 14.4 oz; oboz-footwear.com

**Support: 4.4**

**Comfort: 4**

## Most Versatile

### Hi-Tec V-Lite

### Thunder HPI \$90

You can certainly find less expensive day hikers out there, but you'd be hard-pressed to find any as versatile and sturdy as the Thunder. Testers reported this lightweight hiker was comfy and reliable during every stage of the review process—right out of the box, on day hikes, and even on overnights with 20-plus-pound packs. Credit its combination of forefoot flexibility (for easy striding) and rigid heel shank (for uneven trail support and stability). Plus, thanks to a proprietary "nano-coating" technology, the Thunder is both exceptionally water-resistant and still breathable enough to get high marks for wicking away moisture on a scorching hike in Tucson. 13.3 oz; hi-tec.com

**Support: 3.7**

**Comfort: 4.6**

## Best for Scramble-Hikes

### SCARPA Epic \$95

Most approach shoes are either too slipperlike for hiking or too rigid for scrambling. But SCARPA's Epic hits the sweet spot with its combination of a thick, shock-absorbing EVA foam midsole (for the hike in) and a sticky, smear-ready outsole (for the assault on the top). The crisscrossed webbing overlays aren't just for show—they make a secure fit easier to achieve without creating any pressure points. And go ahead and jam them in cracks: The rubber-and-suede toe rand protected our digits while we scrambled around the talus-filled chutes and steep slabs near Shenandoah's Old Rag Mountain. The narrow fit improves responsiveness when edging but might make it too tight for wide feet. 13.6 oz; scarpa.com

**Support: 3.4**

**Comfort: 4.3**

## How We Tested Them:

Over five months, Jason Stevenson and his team of three testers evaluated 70 pairs of light hikers in six states—from Arizona to Virginia—and Tanzania's Rift Valley.

SCARPA uses 100 percent recycled materials for the laces, webbing, and liner of the Epic. Plus the midsole has a foam that speeds decomposition in a landfill.



KILLER VALUE