

Choosing the Right Snowshoe

Snowshoes have been a part of winter life in North America for at least 6,000 years. For generations, Native Americans laced wooden frames of ash or hickory with *babiche* or rawhide lacing. Many different shapes and sizes developed across the continent based on culture, lifestyle and snow conditions.

With today's modern materials, we're now faced with a dizzying array of snowshoe options. For many, aluminum frames with synthetic decking, metal crampons and plastic bindings have become the norm. While space-age materials do have their place, there are still those of us who appreciate the quiet elegance of the traditional snowshoe.



Exploring the Lake Michigan shoreline on Ojibwa-style snowshoes

Why Wood?

Wooden snowshoes with traditional lacing have some distinct advantages over their more modern counterparts. Place a wooden shoe next to an aluminum one, and you'll usually discover wooden frames present a much larger surface area. This is especially good for larger people or those carrying a backpack, as larger frames provide greater flotation, keeping you on top of the snow better than smaller ones.

Wood is also quiet. Walk through a winter forest filled with snow and you'll discover the slightest noise is magnified. When I'm listening to a chickadee and the whisper of the pines in the crisp air, the *squeak-squeak* of many aluminum shoes drives me crazy! By choosing wooden snowshoes you're also using a natural, renewable resource that is native to the Great Lakes region.

A Tale of Tails

When most people think of wooden snowshoes, they picture frames with pointed tails sticking out the back. The tails of Ojibwa and Huron styles (*shown above*) are designed to act much like the rudder of a boat. Trailing lightly with each step, they keep your feet pointed in the right direction, leading to less fatigue over long distances. Pointed tails do mean reduced maneuverability, however, especially for the beginner. If you plan on whacking through brush and stepping over logs a lot, a different style might be best for you.

Green Mountain Bearpaw

A classic bearpaw-style snowshoe is almost like strapping trash can lids on your feet. Leave it to those creative maple syrup makers to invent an alternative! Named for the Green Mountains of Vermont, this modified bearpaw (*shown above right*) retains the shorter shape as its traditional namesake. Its narrower profile, however, lets you walk with a normal stride. A slightly upturned toe provides additional maneuverability through swamp and briar. Their shorter length also make them easy to strap on a backpack or throw in the trunk of your car.

Whatever style you choose, just don't pass up the chance to get outside and enjoy the sparkling, beautiful season of winter!

By Kyle Bagnall

Snowshoe Kits

Kits offered in Chippewa Nature Center classes are produced by Country Ways^Æ of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Frames of white ash provide incredible strength for all styles. Lacing is tubular nylon, which is easy to use and does not deteriorate over time like rawhide. Both frames and lacing take on a honey brown color (see below) after varnishing. Descriptions of all Country Ways^Æ products can be found at www.snowshoe.com.



Ojibwa

A classic style of the Great Lakes region. Pointed toes (slightly upturned) help you from snagging on brush and pointed tails keep your feet going in the right direction. A large surface area provides great flotation. Comes in four sizes, depending on height and weight of the user (including gear).

Model	Dimensions	Age/Weight	Surface Area
YOUTH	9" x 36"	Age 6 to about 110#	320 sq. in.
SMALL	10" x 48"	Age 8 to about 140#	510 sq. in.
MEDIUM	11" x 54"	130# to about 240#	645 sq. in.
LARGE	12" x 60"	6'tall and 210# and up	700 sq. in.

Huron

From Maine to Michigan, this style is the first thing many people think of when they hear the word "snowshoe." The Huron's upturned toe and large surface area provide great flotation when covering open trail distances. An excellent snowshoe for larger people or those carrying a large pack. Perfect for the traditionalist! *(Photo at right for style purposes only. Kit is slightly different.)*

Model	Dimensions	Age/Weight	Surface Area
CHILDRENS	9" x 29"	abt. age 4 to 80#	300 sq. in.
ADULT	12" x 42"	to about 220#	575 sq. in.



Green Mountain Bearpaw

For maximum maneuverability! The Green Mountain (or modified) bearpaws is quite oval and rounded at both ends, with a slight lift to the toe. Ideal for dense brush and winter campsites where you need to turn in a small area. Often used as expedition spares carried on the back of a pack. Harder walking for long distances than pointed tail snowshoes.

Model	Dimensions	Age / Weight	Surface Area
MEDIUM	10" x 36"	to about 200#	554 sq. in.

Bindings

Boots are attached to snowshoes with a binding, or harness. CNC offers Super-A style bindings (shown at right) with all snowshoe lacing classes.

