

You can definitely become bogged down in the details when it comes to gear for trail running and hiking. I've seen complicated spreadsheets, and so many conversation threads on the interweb along the lines of "what's the best [*insert required gear here*]?". I always reply with what those people don't want to hear:

"It depends, and will come down to personal preference, body type, activity and gender."

Now - before you hit close on my blog and declare me completely useless, bear with me while I explain. First, I'll offer *my* top pieces of gear that I believe are essential, then tell you how to find the perfect piece for *you*.

Are you with me?!



I'll offer my thoughts on the essentials, then explain how to find the perfect piece for you!

Shoes

Let's start with the literal foundation of your run, hike, or climb - your shoes, which can make all the difference to your experience.

I'll say at the outset that if you ask a Facebook group for their favourite shoe, you'll read of every type of shoe available (*eyeroll*) - because feet are so different. My advice is to, if possible, head into a store and try them on. To ensure they fit, bring along the socks you're likely to wear, and go for a walk around the shop to get a feel for the shoes.

If you like to wear bulkier socks in winter (as we do here in New Zealand, in what becomes a very chilly alpine environment), you'll want a fit that accommodates these as well as your socks for warmer weather. When buying online, take the same test when your shoes first arrive to ensure they are the right fit for you.



Your shoes are literally the foundation of your run, hike, or climb.

Boots or Shoes?

If you are partaking in both hiking and trail running regularly, having both options is great. Otherwise:

- If you mostly hike with a heavy pack, go with a boot that offers some ankle support.
- If you mostly run and fast-pack, setting off on the occasional heavy-pack hike - go with trail shoes. For reference, I hiked across New Zealand wearing my fav trail runners!

Tread, Drop, Stack?

Drop any of these words among a group of trail runners, and you'll instigate an animated discussion with personal opinions about the pros and cons of each.

So, here's the crux of it:

- **Tread** is, arguably, the most important feature of your shoes in the outdoors. Whether you are hiking or running the trails, you want to stick to them. This is a simple one: wear trail shoes and hiking boots when venturing into the wild, and leave the road shoes for the road. I've seen many people on the trails wearing shoes that don't have suitable tread - and it's a disaster! Most shoes are advertised for the terrain they are suitable for - so *buy*

for the terrain that you spend most of your time on.

- **Drop** is the height difference between your heel and forefoot. It can be argued for low versus high, depending on your stride style, calf-length, and whether you climb a lot - it all gets a little *'Beautiful Mind'*. Zero drop, or a 13-millimetre drop? Go with whatever feels best for you. Start in the middle if you aren't sure. Around 8 millimetres is a good all-round shoe for flat surfaces, undulating terrain, and climbing. The most important point here is that you stretch your calf muscles after a run or hike, as they are affected by the 'drop'. It's also recommended to factor calf raises into your strength workout.
- **Stack** is basically how far off the ground you will be! For example, Hoka's generally have a high stack, and Inov-8 generally have a low. A higher stack will have more cushioning - great for hard-packed trails - while a lower stack will offer better proprioception (or ground-feel). What does that mean? With a lower stack, you should be more responsive on technical terrain because your feet can feel and adapt better to the changes underfoot. If you are mostly on technical trails that vary in terrain, consider going for a lower stack. On the other hand, if you are mainly on hard-packed trails for long runs, a higher stack will offer more comfort. I have both: my comfortable, cushioned shoes for my everyday runs, and my lower stack for mountain missions and races.

Packs

Now that you have your shoes sorted, we can move onto the pack.

The most important considerations here are size and fit. Again, I recommend trying on packs and heading in-store to be fitted if you can. When ordering online, check the size guides to achieve the right fit - and when your online order arrives, try it on with added weight to ensure it feels comfortable. If you are a woman, choose a women-specific fit - there is a difference.

In an ideal world, we would all have a gear room lined with a pack of every size (*sigh*, a girl can dream - and over time this dream can become a reality). To start with though, I would recommend three sizes to cover you from trail running to multi-day missions. In case you didn't know, the 'size' of a pack (outside of body size and fit) is based on the capacity of a pack, measured in litres.



The 'size' of a pack is based on the capacity of a pack, measured in litres.

Trail running

There are different-sized packs available, but a great all-rounder would come in around a 12-litre capacity. This should cover you for all-day missions and should fit all the required gear for most ultra-races.

Day hikes and fast-packing

Whether you're heading out on a day hike and need a little more gear and food, or on a fast-packing overnigher - a pack of around 30 litres will fit the bill. If you're likely to be running, look for a pack with either a waist strap, or a chest strap with a lower strap to stop the bag



from bouncing about on your back as you increase your pace.

Multiday

When you're off on a longer mission into the wilderness with a tent, sleeping bag, roll mat, multiple days' worth of food, and a cooker (you get the picture) – you will require everything to survive on your back. For these kinds of missions, you're looking for a pack of around 65 litres. Look for comfort through the straps, back support, and pockets on the front side of the waist belt for your phone, compass, and snacks.

Clothing

Having the right clothing is essential, as feeling too hot or too cold can be just miserable. Obviously, clothing will be dependent on the climate in which you are moving – but there are some basics that should be in your kit.

I'm going to keep it simple here, with up top, bottom half, and accessories!



Clothing will be dependent on the climate in which you are moving.

Up Top

- Start with a good crop-top or sports bra. Avoid cotton at all costs. It's terrible when wet, so go for synthetic and merino.
- Next is a tee. Go for a sports top of technical fabric here. You want something that is moisture-wicking and quick-drying.
- The next layer is your thermal – be it synthetic or merino, go for something that is warm and dries quickly.
- Mid-layer is more for hiking and multiday trips than trail running, and could either be fleece or merino. Essentially, it's that added layer for when things cool down. The mid-layer's warmth is based on fabric weight, so around 200 grams is a good starting point.
- Puffer jacket – idea for trail-running in cooler climates, hiking, and multiday trips. The goal here is to find the warmest jacket at the lightest weight. Synthetic is great here because they are lightweight and dry quickly.
- Finally, the water- and windproof layers. If you live in a warmer climate and aren't heading alpine, you'll likely only need a standard seam-sealed jacket. If you *are* headed into more inclement climates, investing in a high-quality Gore-Tex jacket will be the best move you ever make.

Bottom Half

- Either start with whatever underwear is comfortable for you – or go commando, that works too! If chaffing is an issue, apply some anti-chafe cream.
- Shorts or tights are your next layer. For me, it's shorts in summer and tights in winter. I

also have fleece-lined tights for when the temperature really drops!

- Waterproof or Gore-Tex pants – essential for most trail races, and just a must-have safety garment when heading out over winter.
- Socks. There are heaps of brands on offer, so find what works for you. My top tip here is to make sure they fit well within your shoes to avoid blisters. My bonus tip is to use lube on your feet for long days out. It can feel weird, and kinda icky to start with – but your feet will love you for it!

Accessories

- A Buff tube – that piece of stretchy fabric that is so multipurpose. Wear it as a neck gaiter, or over your head and ears for warmth. Soak it in cool water and wrap around the wrist to beat the heat, or to wipe the snot, sweat, and whatever else on a big day out! Having a buff or two in your kit is essential.
- Gloves are a vital piece in a winter running kit. Wind- and waterproof can be great, but start with some basic sports gloves (because cold hands are the worst).
- Winter hat – often a requirement for trail running races, and good to have if you're in a cold climate. Think skull-cap style and go for merino to keep you toasty. If you need to wear a hat, don't skimp on it.
- Caps, shades, watches – these are all nice to have, but not essential. If you are just getting started, don't get hung up on them. Start with the basics and essentials, and add to your kit as you can over time.

So – that is my list of essentials and your 'capsule wardrobe' for running and hiking. Shoes, a pack, and the clothes on your back! Start with these pieces, and you'll build the foundation of gear that will take you to all the places you've dreamed about. Whether you run, hike, or multiday tramp – on-track or off – the basics remain the same.



Your 'capsule wardrobe' for running and hiking: shoes, a pack, and the clothes on your back!

My FAVS!

For those who already have the above, and are thinking about what's next – this list details my favourite pieces of kit, on top of the basics.

Poles

Be it running, walking, or crawling the mountains – poles are just 'betterer'. I call mine Jack and Jill – and I LOVE them. Here's why:

- By recruiting more muscles to do the work, they can improve your endurance and power when climbing.
- More points of contact provide better balance and stability. Ever watched a mountain goat climb a steep, rocky incline? Imagine if they only had two legs!

- Thanks to their contribution in improving efficiency, poles help to save energy on steeper terrain. The more efficient you are, the less your body has to work!
- When your body is wrecked, and you've slowed to a shuffle – poles provide support on the downhill, which can go a long way. Or, once you've become more skilled, they can also up your downhill game on technical terrain.

Headphones

Ohhhh, controversial! The purists will say you should listen to nature – I say I'd rather not hear my heavy breathing when I'm training hard or racing!

Music while training just makes me happy. So I'm going to wear my headphones and sing out loud, out of tune when I'm out of breath, and maybe have a wee dance as I go – because I can.

- Waterproof, wireless, and with a long-lasting battery are the go.
- If you are on a busy trail, I recommend wearing only one bud so you can still hear what's going on around you.



Music while training just makes me happy!

Nutrition

I like easy-to-consume calories when I'm on the go. Once you've practiced eating, you'll figure out what works for you. Here are my fav foods and top tips:

- As a carb-burner, my go-to are lollies, gels, and carb-based drinks.
- For tramping and hiking, look for the highest calorie content per weight. I look for anything with 400-calories per 100 grams or higher, to max out the calories for the weight I have to carry.
- Dehydrated meals are your friend – both lightweight and easy to transport.
- I carry a small, collapsible rubber cup to enjoy water from creeks, streams, and rivers when I'm out hiking too.



I like easy-to-consume calories when I'm on the go!



Dehydrated meals are your friend – both lightweight and easy to transport.

Recovery Compression Boots

I'm not talking about Uggs here...

When I think of my compression boots, I imagine a choir of angels singing with their arms extended, as the recovery boots float like a gift from above, bathed in golden light.

So, it's fair to say that in writing any 'gear guide', I'm going to add my boots. Here's why they are so great:

- Improve circulation

- Enhance lymphatic drainage
- Remove waste products, including lactic acid
- Improve range of movement and flexibility
- Decrease recovery time
- Increase flexibility and joint range of motion
- Enable adventurers to relax and unwind

 *My recovery compression boots are like a gift sent from above!*
Looking for further info on any of the above? Feel free to drop me a line. Otherwise - happy adventuring, and hopefully I'll see you out there sometime!

Wanting to upgrade your hiking kit?