



By Simon Gibson

If you try on a pair of boots and there are uncomfortable pressure points then look out as this will cause you untold grief on the hill

LOWA Tibets

Great fitting boots

One of the most important pieces of hunting kit you can have is a good pair of boots. Nothing will ruin a trip quicker than an ill-fitting pair or worse still a pair that falls to bits a day's tramp from the road end. There is now a huge range of boots on the New Zealand market which range from cheap models up to much more expensive European brands like LOWA and Meindl.

LOWA BOOTS

- European boot maker Lowa, based in Germany's Bavaria, was founded way back in 1923 by Lorenz Wagner. Their hand crafted boots have been used by generations of mountaineers, climbers, trampers and hunters and have earned the company a reputation as a manufacturer of quality boots. Interestingly, many of their craftsmen are second and third generation and in some cases fourth generation employees.
- The company recently achieved ISO 9001 certification for its quality management systems, one of only two footwear companies in Germany to do this.
- When you buy a boot from a manufacturer like LOWA that has been around for so long you are buying a quality boot that incorporates design features and manufacturing processes that have been refined over many years.

LOWA TIBET PRO GTX WXL

The LOWA Tibet Pro GTX is a rugged boot ideally suited for the roughest of New Zealand's terrain and for carrying heavy pack weights.

The WXL stands for extra wide which is important in NZ where we tend to have wide feet. GTX denotes that the boots are Gore-



Top: The horns on the "puff bull" were far better than we first thought after we analysed our photos but he was still a young animal and will make a great trophy in a few years.

Above: The LOWA Tibet Pro GTX is a quality European boot suitable for the roughest of New Zealand conditions.

Tex lined using Lowa's patented system. This boot is packed with innovation and features all designed to give the wearer a comfortable fit while providing good ankle support. The Tibet boot is fitted with a Vibram Masai sole which has an excellent aggressive self-cleaning tread pattern and is crampon compatible.

A feature I really liked were the great brakes, the undercut heel front gives superb grip when coming down wet tussock slopes and steep country. The shock absorbing mid sole is made from polyurethane which provides cushioning. When you eventually wear the sole out these boots can be re-soled by returning them to LOWA who will also replace the shock absorbing mid sole and rand.

The boot has a full length 5mm thick nylon stabilizer shank which makes it a stiff boot, ideal for uneven terrain and good for steep country where you are sidling using the edge of the boot to bite into the hillside or putting all of your weight on the toe area as you climb. The shank is also great for stopping your foot being squashed if it gets wedged between river boulders. This is topped off with a visco-elastic insole which moulds to the shape of your foot.

When walking for extended periods of time, muscle tiredness



Correct fitting of this boot is very important. When you put the boot on you loosen the laces right off so you can pull the tongue forward allowing you to get your foot in easily without stretching your socks tightly over your toes. You then kick your foot back so the heel is against the back of the boot and then do the fore-foot part of the lacing system up to a reasonably relaxed fit. The laces are then locked in a locking lace loop so the upper part of the boot can be laced snugly which locks your foot into the back of the boot.

Top Left: Boot tongues have a habit of wanting to migrate around your ankle, so to compensate for this LOWA has added extra padding on the outside of the tongue.

Left: The LOWA Tibets have an excellent aggressive tread and great brakes, an undercut heel that bites into wet tussock and dirt on steep slopes. The high rubber rand around the boot does an excellent job of protecting the upper leather of the boot and the stitching from sharp rocks.



around which guarantees the tongue stays in place vertically and horizontally and doesn't slip down and cause friction points.

The boot incorporates a Gore-Tex lining and LOWA's climate control system to help wick sweat and heat away from the feet and works best when used in conjunction with good quality socks like Thorlo's made of man-made fibres which are hydrophobic i.e. they repel moisture.

When using a good quality synthetic "wicking" sock in the Tibet Pro, the thermal gradient created by warm feet and the pumping action of the foot in the boot forces moisture out through the Gore-Tex membrane which also acts as a non return valve.

A system of ventilation channels between the leather upper and padding/lining allows the moisture and heat to exit the boot through

can often lead to over-pronation where the shin bone bends inwards more than normal. This can cause twisted ankles and joint pain. To help stop this LOWA has canted the boot slightly outward and added several hard inserts between the sole and midsole to create the perfect foot bed.

The Tibet has an excellent high rand, the rubber strip of which comes up from the sole and protects the lower leather parts and stitching. This is a very desirable feature when hunting in rough terrain if you are to avoid sharp rocks destroying the leather upper and stitching when alpine hunting.

The upper part of the boot is Nubuck leather which is made from cow rawhide then buffed to a hard wearing and sturdy surface. This is topped with a soft cuff for comfort.

The Tibet Pro uses a two zone lacing system with rings on the lower part of the boot and locking eyelets on the upper. When you put the boot on you loosen the laces right off so you can pull the tongue forward to get your foot in easily without stretching your socks tightly over your toes. You then kick your foot back so the heel is against the back of the boot. Then do the fore-foot part of the lacing system up to a reasonably relaxed fit. The laces are then locked in a locking lace loop, allowing the upper part of the boot to be laced snugly. Your foot is now locked into the back of the boot which allows your toes to move freely and not be mashed when coming down steep hills.

It is now that the 3D Flexfit comes in, allowing ankle joint movement in all directions. It may be necessary to readjust the laces later in the day to compensate for foot expansion.

Boot tongues have a habit of wanting to migrate outwards around your ankle so to compensate for this LOWA has added extra padding on the outside of the tongue. They also use "X-Lacing" which consists of a stud on the tongue which the laces are looped

perforations on the cuff, tongue and to a certain extent the leather upper if its pores are not clogged. This type of construction will allow a boot to dry out far quicker when completely soaked.

YOU NEED MORE THAN ONE TYPE OF HUNTING BOOT

New Zealand has many different types of hunting terrain from easy hunting out the back of a farm to some very rough alpine terrain. A cheap boot is only suitable for some types of hunting while an expensive heavy duty one is good for all types of hunting although not always ideal for sneaking around in dry beech leaf country after sika. The answer is simple: you need several pairs of boots.

Lightweight boots are ideal for hunting sika, but when it comes carrying a big pack on trips to areas like Fiordland or alpine hunting you need to spend a lot of money and buy top quality boots. This is one area where you really do get what you pay for. Cheap boots have their place but not in the rough stuff. Recently a good hunting mate of mine had his cheap boots fall to pieces in Fiordland. First one heel fell off followed a day or so later by the other which caused him considerable discomfort.

FINDING THE PERFECT FIT OF BOOT

In deciding on what type of boot you are going to buy you need to consider what type of terrain you are hunting and whether you going to be carrying heavy or light loads. Talk to hunting shop sales people and use the internet to research different features of boots to help you decide on a brand.

Rough country and heavy loads demand higher levels of stability and ruggedness in a boot and these tend to be more expensive but well worth it. European type boots with no heel or soles that are narrower than the upper part of the boot have no place in New Zealand's outdoors and can be downright dangerous in steep country.

Once you have decided on what type and brand of boots you are going to buy getting a pair that is correctly sized for your feet



is absolutely essential. There are many factors to consider when getting the correct fit of boot.

If you were to measure your feet you would find that the dimensions differ considerably. In other words you have mismatched feet which means that the perfectly matched pair of boots you are buying need to fit your different sized feet. What you need to do is buy a pair of boots that fit the biggest of your two feet

MEASUREMENTS ARE CRITICAL

The days of measuring your feet with a Brannock foot measuring device, the slide scale shops use to measure foot length only are long gone. A critical measurement is the "heel to ball" fit. This is the distance from the back of your heel to the ball of your foot. The ball is behind your big toe where your foot pivots as you walk and is in the widest part of your foot. The boot must be wide enough to not squash your foot and toes as the boot tapers towards the toe. This can mean a bigger pair of boots than your normal shoe size or a different brand of boot to get a good fit.

Cramping in the 'toe box' can cause blackened or ripped off toe nails and even nerve damage. If you try on a pair of boots and there are uncomfortable pressure points then look out as this will cause you untold grief on the hill.

To ensure there is sufficient space in front of your longest toe, unlace the boot and slide your foot to front. The space between the heel and the back should be a thumb width.

THERMAL AND WEIGHT BEARING FIT

During the day the size of your feet will increase by about 5% in volume due to the body sending more blood to the muscles and tissues getting the most use. This is why the seemingly good fitting boots you put on in the morning are a real relief to get off at the

end of the day. The answer is to get boots fitted at the end of the day or to go for a run before the fitting.

When you try a pair of boots on when seated the fit will be quite different to when you stand and have a weight on your back. Your feet will change in size and shape. Walk around in them and make sure they are flexing around the "ball joint" and that the creasing where the boot is flexing is not biting into your foot.

SOCKS

When trying on a pair of boots you will ideally be wearing the socks you would use in them. Woollen socks retain a lot of water and the fibre will also compress when wet and won't give you much protection against blisters and chaffing. The socks I use now are synthetic Thorlo socks which have a high acrylic content which



Above: These injuries were the result of a cheap, ill-fitting pair of boots and a bad choice of socks which ruined my mate's trip. Left: The use of a full length nylon stabilizer shank makes the Tibet a stiff boot ideal for steep uneven terrain, especially when carrying a big load.

is proven to help prevent blisters and they don't compress when wet. Against the foot I use the Thorlo thin cushion liner sock and then over that the Thorlo Trekking sock which has padding in the pressure points. The yarns used in these modern socks also help in wicking moisture away from your feet and through the Gore-Tex membrane of your boot if they have this feature. Good socks for outdoor use are not cheap but boy are they worth it and should be thought of as a foot/sock/boot integrated system.

BOOT CARE

Proper boot care is essential if you are going to get the most out of a good pair of boots. Once you get home all dirt and foreign material needs to be washed off using lukewarm water and the boots allowed to air and dry.

Never ever place your boots in front of a fire or other source of high heat as the wet leather can be damaged very easily and will shrink and become brittle. When leaving them to dry out don't leave them in direct sunlight or on a sheltered porch as this can be just as bad as a high heat source.

LOWA supplies a water proofing spray and a leather care cream with every purchase for the recommended treatment of Gore-Tex lined leather boots. Once waterproofed, the Active Cream is applied to the leather to keep it supple. If you don't use a boot care cream on leather boots they will eventually dry out and crack. Store your boots in a dry well-aired place and avoid damp places.

LOWA discourages the use of wax and Snowseal type products for the care of uppers on their boots as it clogs the leather's pores and in a worst case scenario can leach into the leather and cause



breakdown to the bond between the leather and the rand and sole.

LOWA WARRANTY

Lowa boots are warranted to be free of defects in manufacture and materials for a period of 12 months from date of purchase. Should there be a warranty issue then the boots will be repaired or replaced at LOWA'S discretion. But be warned, if you have had repairs carried out by another party then you will void your warranty.

CONCLUSION

I used these boots for tahr and chamois hunting, red deer hunting in the Rimutakas and on a two week trip into Fiordland. At no time did I ever have any problems with blisters or chaffing even when I wore them for the first time as no break in period is needed. The aggressive tread and undercut heel gave superb grip on wet tussock slopes and the high rand was very effective in stopping boot damage from sharp scree slides.

I did find that the Masai Vibram sole did not give much grip on slimy river boulders. With my feet locked into the back of the boot I could come down steep hillsides with a pack on and not suffer from having my toes mashed. When I was carrying a heavy pack there was ample ankle support and the stiff full length shank meant rough terrain could be crossed with ease without looking where I putting my feet at every step.

The LOWA Tibets are not a cheap boot but are a high quality German boot that will last you a long time if cared for properly. They are an excellent choice that I thoroughly recommend.



James Morris in the mountain country he loves.

LOWA TIBETS IN THE FIELD

It had been a few years since I had last chased tahr up the Godley so when James rang and asked if I'd be interested in a spring tahr hunt in McKenzie country I jumped at the chance. Often in spring you can catch bull tahr out feeding down low where they are after sweet spring growth and this is exactly what happened.

After being picked up at Christchurch airport, the three hour drive sped by as we caught up on all our hunting news since we'd last met. After a quick sort out of gear we were off on a three hour walk to a classic little mountain hut that we were to spend the next few days at. With evening approaching and the hut in sight, we stopped to glass bluffs behind the hut and James quickly spotted several bulls. Several minutes later I had another two with classic big fluffy manes in sight and better still they were very low down, feeding on spring growth in a wet gut. Wasting no time we dropped our packs at the hut and headed up a creek after them but they were onto us well before we got within range and slowly disappeared over the ridge top high above. While glassing where they had gone, I spotted a magnificent bull with a long white puffed up mane feeding on the skyline. We nick named him the "puff bull" and planned a stalk for the next day to see if we could meet up with him.

Away early we had a big climb ahead of us as we planned on climbing around behind and above the tahr we had seen. As usual with this sort of country, the route planned in the comfort of the hut

took considerably longer to traverse than we thought it would. We saw far fewer tahr than the night before but as we climbed we picked up animals here and there bedded under rock overhangs and saw quite a few bulls in the scrub. The day was a real scorcher and frequent stops were made to glass and soak up the magnificent scenery. By 2pm we were finally on top of the range at nearly 2000 metres and having lunch while watching some nannies nearby.

We now had the rest of the afternoon to work our way through a series of head basins and creek heads while slowly descending down to the main river. James lead the way into a cracker of a gut that just screamed tahr: lots of bluffs, scrub and growth on the edges of the stream way below. It is in this type of country that the stiff shank in the LOWA Tibets is brilliant for helping you sidle very steep country where only the edge of your boot is contacting the hill side.

It wasn't long before James gave the classic hunter's signal that game had been sighted as he suddenly dropped to a crouch with one hand raised to halt my progress while mouthing the words, "Bull tahr". Down below was a beautiful bull feeding his way across a small scrubby face and what's more he had a great set of horns. Dropping height quickly we were having trouble keeping up with him as he fed through a series of guts. Suddenly we came out on to a prominent knob and there he was 170 metres away staring intently at us. I was using 162 grain A-Max projectiles in Sako and the bull never knew what hit him. Ten minutes later I was elated to find I had taken a 12 1/8 inch bull tahr. While taking photos we spotted a group of seven bulls way below us but we had a date with the Puff Bull so slowly climbed our way back on to the top of the range so we could come down the ridge we had last seen him on.

As rock started giving way to tussock the clouds that had been



Left: Dreadful damage like this can be avoided with a good choice of boot and sock. Photo: Mike Wilkinson



FEATURES

- WXL-Extra Wide
- GTX Lowa patented Gore-Tex waterproof lining
- Self cleaning Vibram Masai Sole
- Shock absorbing polyurethane mid sole provides cushioning
- Strap-on crampon compatible
- 5mm nylon shank makes the Tibet a stiff boot-perfect for sidling and climbing
- X-Lacing stud on the tongue which the laces are looped around. Guarantees the tongue stays in place vertically and horizontally
- Outer-Nubuk leather
- Perforated lining for pumping air and moisture out
- Two zone lacing system of rings and eyelets for easy on/off
- No break-in period



SIMON'S TIPS

- **When buying boots think of it as a foot-sock-boot integrated system**
- **A perfect fit leaves a thumb width between the heel and boot back with the foot hard forward into the toe**
- **Try on boots after exercise – your foot will have swelled 5% above normal size**
- **The fit is different when sitting. Get up and walk around when trying**
- **Check that the crease where the foot flexes does not dig into your feet**
- **Never, ever dry boots with a high heat source (direct sunlight, open fire)**



The author with his 12 1/8 inch bull tahr.

billowing over the range from the West Coast started to drop light rain that made the tussock very slippery. However the aggressive tread and undercut heel on the Tibets gave outstanding grip. After sidling through several guts I made the classic mistake of cresting a ridge too fast and there 50 metres away was the Puff Bull along with four young bulls bedded in the tussock. As our eyes met he was on his feet and gone as the young bulls milled around before following him. We had quickly assessed his horns at about 12

inches so opted to shoot him with cameras only.

There's nothing like the feeling of satisfaction when you get back to a snug mountain hut after a big day on the hill and we finally flopped down for a brew at 10pm. One of the great features of digital cameras is you can relive the day by viewing your pictures and there's nothing better than showing your mate a great animal shot. Analysing our photos of the Puff Bull we came to the conclusion that he may have been a fair bit better than we had first thought however he was still a young animal.

Given that the bulls were not coming out until late afternoon we delayed the following day's hunt until after lunch then headed for the bluffs on the faces overlooking the main river valley up from the hut. Hours of gut busting climbing put us within range of several good looking bulls we had spotted from the river bed and James pulled off a great 300 metre uphill shot at a very steep angle to take one of them however his horns were smaller than we had first thought. With evening approaching no time was wasted as we took photos, meat and then high tailed it down to the valley floor. This is where my LOWA Tibet's really came into their own. The stiff shank and ankle support were fantastic for coming down the uneven terrain and the high rand provided great protection to the leather uppers and stitching when coming down screens.

After a lazy pack up the following morning we headed down river for home. It was another scorcher of a day but some very dark clouds were building overhead and as we neared the car we were absolutely drenched by a sudden downpour which of course stopped as we reached the car. It's always sad when a great trip comes to an end however we were already planning our next trip-chasing chamois bucks on the West Coast.

