

## SNOWSHOE SELECTION:

The short article below has good information for choosing a snowshoe for trips such as the field trip in Mount Rainier National Park. If you already own or can borrow snowshoes, please bring them to the classroom session.

Snowshoes for the fieldtrip should have tubular metal frames (once leading edge, now minimally acceptable), or a metal frame made from a flat bar bent into a long oval shape, usually toothed on the bottom (e.g., MSR Lightning), or a molded plastic deck (e.g., MSR Evo). They must have traction features, such as toothed metal crampons or serrated metal traction bars.

Excerpt from THE WINTER MOUNTAINEERING NEWS, December 2023, a publication of the Rochester Winter Mountaineering Society:

Equipment preferences vary greatly from person to person. You will have to learn what works best for you. Do not blindly trust equipment recommendations from people at sporting goods stores, reviews on the internet, or recommendations from friends. Try before you buy whenever possible. Many winter specific items can be rented or borrowed. Snowshoes in particular should be rented and tried in the Adirondacks [*or your local hills and mountains*] before you buy. Some suggestions and recommendations are given below for your consideration. You don't need to buy a lot of expensive gear for winter trips. For your first few winter trips you should buy as little gear as possible in case you find that winter hiking and camping is not to your liking.

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Online backcountry.com is very good and great deals often can be found on equipment, particularly clothing, at [www.rei-outlet.com](http://www.rei-outlet.com) or [www.sierratradingpost.com](http://www.sierratradingpost.com).

Snowshoe selection is especially critical. If you do not have snowshoes you can rent them from REI but make sure to reserve them well in advance. Good mountaineering snowshoes have aggressive steel crampons for traction, and secure bindings to hold them firmly to your boots. Most RWMS members use 30" snowshoes, but some lighter members of the group use 25" snowshoes. Snowshoes that are 36" or longer are not recommended. Aluminum crampons are not recommended (steel is much more durable). The most popular brands include MSR (Denali Ascent or Evolution), Tubbs (Elevation Series or Mountain Series), and Atlas (8 series, 10 series, 12 series). As you go up in price you get better durability, more secure bindings, larger crampons for improved traction on steep terrain, and additional weight. Make sure the bindings fit your insulated boots and can be adjusted with mitten-covered hands. You can often order different bindings or crampons from the snowshoe manufacturer. One feature to note is the hinge that attaches the binding to the snowshoe. Some snowshoes have the tails drag when you lift your foot; other have the tail lift with your foot. People tend to strongly prefer one type of hinge over the other. Hinges do occasionally break so bring a few repair items. [Note: Nylon zip ties or cable ties, 4" to 8", are the most useful for field repairs.]

The above material is used by kind permission of the Rochester Winter Mountaineering Society. Founded in 1965, the Society's members hike and backpack the mountains of the Northeastern US and volcano peaks in Latin

America. For more information:

<https://sites.google.com/site/rwmsinfo/Home?authuser=0>

If you are sure you want to buy snowshoes, MSR Evo Ascents are a good choice. Shop sales and discount sites to pay less than retail. MSR Denali Ascents are no longer in production, but you can probably find them on eBay at good prices. If old, they may need new binding straps (about \$20).

Suitable snowshoes may be rented from most REI stores, and from Whittaker's Mountaineering shop in Ashford, and the Longmire General Store in Mt Rainier National Park. Rentals should be picked up the day before, not morning of, the field trip, if at Mt. Rainier. The Olympia Branch Mountaineers has a **limited number** of snowshoes available **to borrow on a first come, first served basis**. Please contact Mike Forsyth at 315-884-3673 if you wish to borrow a pair.

Some models, including MSR Evo Ascents and MSR Denali Ascents, have optional extensions or tails. These attach to the back end of the snowshoe and extend the deck and flotation area. The MSRs are available in 4" and 8" lengths. I have used both. If you are hiking with a full winter backpack, they do provide a little more flotation, but for most people with a day pack, especially with a group on a broken trail, they are not necessary. The 4" may be useful, but I think the 8" don't add much more flotation, because your center of gravity is so far forward of the added surface area. They can make turning and foot placement difficult in tight places.

The snowshoes you wear on the field trip should be about 8-9" wide. Wood-framed snowshoes, or the army surplus metal-framed shoes shaped like traditional wood-framed snowshoes, will not be acceptable for the field trip. For efficient winter travel, we all need to walk in the same packed track, taking turns leading and breaking trail. Traditional designs are too wide to fit the same track as the rest of us.

Breaking trail is an important aspect of snowshoeing. One of the oldest reported accounts of breaking trail in new snow is in the Christmas carol "Good King Wenceslas". Wenceslas was Duke of Bohemia, died in 935, and was later promoted to king and canonized. The song tells of him and his page seeing a poor peasant on the day after Christmas, and the two of them going to bring food and drink to the hungry peasant in harsh winter conditions.

Page and monarch forth they went,  
Forth they went together,  
Through the rude wind's wild lament  
And the bitter weather.

'Sire, the night is darker now  
And the wind blows stronger;  
Fails my heart, I know not how,  
I can go no longer.'  
'Mark my footsteps, good my page,  
Tread thou in them boldly:  
Thou shalt find the winter's rage  
Freeze thy blood less coldly.'

In his master's steps he trod,

Where the snow lay dinted;  
Heat was in the very sod  
Which the Saint had printed.

The full lyrics and background may be found here:

<https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/real-story-good-king-wenceslas-carol/>