

My wonderful
web-footed winter
adventure.

Walk a Mile in These Shoes

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The winter had been tough on children and adults. The weatherman seemed to taunt listeners by even the mention of potential powdery precipitation. New sleds stood propped in the garage. A fresh coat of wax glistened on cross-country skis. Closet doors groaned with winter apparel standing at the ready. Time after time, hopes were

Easily adjustable bindings make quick work of strapping snowshoes on and provide versatility in the size and type of boot worn.

dashed when yet another winter storm bypassed central Illinois.

But the dream of a winter wonderland finally became a reality. At last I had a chance to try out my new winter toy—a pair of snowshoes.

Now I readily admit to doing my share of crying and moaning as winter approaches. I'm a fair-weather gal and my sport of choice revolves around strapping on a pair of fins and submerging into warm, crystal-clear seas. My dreams of glistening white landscapes seldom involve snow.

But there I was, an utter novice preparing to strap snowshoes on my



snowshoer makes. But that same trait makes snowshoeing conducive to conversation and a sport adaptable to sharing the trail with a friend.

The woodland was quiet, except for the occasional sharp and explosive “chick-a-dee-dee-dee” call from a barren branch high overhead. Squirrels bounded about the blanketed forest floor in search of nuts stored on long-forgotten, balmy fall days.

“Thank you!” a cross-country skier called out as we passed on the trail. “This is my third trek around and I’ve really started to build up some speed. I appreciate that you’ve walked to the side of the trail and not over my tracks.”

A little courtesy on the trail never hurts.

The woodland always provides a place to escape from the rush of everyday life and an opportunity to recharge one’s battery. Even more so when a carpet of pure-white snow renews the senses.

And yes, if you can walk, you can snowshoe.



A new-fallen snow provides an excuse for a little exercise and wildlife watching, but responsible snowshoeing means staying hydrated to minimize the risk of hypothermia.

feet. Determined to have a quiet day outdoors and burn a few calories, I entered the woodland without any prior coaching, putting faith in the advice I’d found on a website that said “if you can walk you can snowshoe.”

Why snowshoes and not cross-country skis? From my research, the short learning curve and diversity of suitable trail conditions, including narrow woodland paths, made snowshoes the choice for me. Not to mention that they are inexpensive and can be used in a variety of conditions—from snow to slush to ice. My mission that day was to observe nature, a benefit of the slow, quiet progress a

Tips for a safe and enjoyable snowshoe adventure

- Even though snowshoes are inexpensive, if you have any questions about your long-term interest in the sport, find a service that rents snowshoes. Those same businesses often offer short clinics on how to choose the right snowshoe (information on the various shapes, sizes and styles of bindings) and how to walk and run in snowshoes.
- The number of snowshoers in the United States has doubled to 1 million in the last decade, due in large part to the excellent cardiovascular conditioning and low-impact aerobic activity it provides. Runners, in-line skaters and bicyclists have discovered snowshoeing as a winter cross-training option. You’ll be burning 400-plus calories per hour so pace yourself.
- Dress for the weather. Wear layers so you can adjust to temperature changes as you warm up and cool down.
- Pack a lightweight backpack or waist pack with some high-energy snacks (fruit, energy bars), water (the danger of hypothermia increases significantly when you are dehydrated) and sunscreen.
- Start out slow. Walk around your backyard or a local park, beginning with flat or gently rolling terrain and working your way up to those killer hills.
- Warm up before you hit the trail. Take a few minutes to do some stretches and get your muscles warmed up before taking off.
- To give your upper body—arms, shoulders and back muscles—a workout, use poles while snowshoeing. Poles also can help with your rhythm and balance.
- Enjoy nature. Take the time to listen to birds, smell the freshness of winter and watch sunlight throw dappled shadows on new-fallen snow.