

The Path
discover your way



FOOT CARE & BOOT CHOICE FOR JUNGLE ENVIRONMENT

JOHAN BERGMAN

Foot Care & Boot Choice

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Foreword

Taking care of your feet in the jungle is vital. I have done jungle treks when nothing has happened with my feet, and then on the other hand I have also done a couple that really slaughtered my feet. During the jungle treks I always have a notepad, and scribble down notes on everything, especially on improvement. So when I do another trek I have done some improvements. Nowadays I only get athlete's foot. Hmm just because I wrote this now I will probably get something nasty next time. In this book we have put together foot care and boots since we think that a good pair of boots/shoes is included in the foot care department. I hope you'll be helped by reading this book, to get an idea of how it is in the jungle, what you have to do to condition your feet and what you need to bring.

Johan Bergman



Foot Care



Before you leave

The receipt for disaster in the jungle is to bring a pair of not broken boots and a pair of feet that is not conditioned, voila! There are a couple of things I recommend you should do a couple of months before you depart.

- Barefoot walking
- Break your jungle boots in
- Get quality synthetic socks
- See a podiatrist
- Care for your feet
- Learn where you have your hot spots
- Learn how to tape your feet

Barefoot walking is great I think, for toughening the foot sole and strengthen up your feet. Try to do it in the forest, on small trails, and do it whenever you can. It will take a while but it's worth it.

Break your jungle boots in by actually use them. If you're unsure on how to break them in please see the boots chapter.

Get quality synthetic socks and never ever cotton socks. You can use one or two pairs of socks. If I only use one pair of socks I would go for a cushioned pair of socks, and if I use two pairs of socks I would like to have a very thin sock next to my skin, and on top of that a thicker pair. But still I think the best way is

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to go without socks. With that I mean that you will be wet all the time, and the socks make sure that your feet never dries out.

See a podiatrist 4 weeks before departure. Come well prepared, and by that I mean; Don't let them take away the toughened skin on your foot sole or anywhere else on your feet. Have questions prepared for the podiatrist, like how do I cut my toenails etc. Tell the podiatrist what you are going to do, and he/she will tell you how to deal with it. The podiatrist is a foot specialist, and he will see your feet and tell you about your strengths and weaknesses. So now you have approximately four weeks left to train and condition your feet, and now your feet are perfect.

Care for your feet. If you neglect them they will make your stay hellish. Use a foot file daily or weekly, try to do it before or after your shower. Cut your toenails straight. Use a foot lotion every night. When you're buying a foot lotion you will need a high quality foot lotion. We recommend Gehwol®, go to their international web-site and look for a dealer at www.gehwol.com.

Learn where you have your hot spots by walking a lot in your jungle boots. When you walk for 10-20km/ 6-12mi you will start to see what I mean, If you haven't got a blister you'll know where you will get one. This is usually "your" places for blisters etc. I have my places for blisters and you have yours, no one is the same.

Learn how to tape your feet, either you buy a book or you use internet. It's better to learn how to tape now and have the time to practice, than have to learn the hard way in the jungle.

Note: If you're a diabetic please consult your doctor first.

During Your Trek

Now when you have entered the jungle you have toughened your feet, your boot are well broken in, you have socks you know works and you'll like, you have seen a podiatrist so your feet are well, you have cared for your feet for quite a while now, you know where your hot spots are and you know how to deal with them. Now let's see if we can put everything together for you.

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Morning

I usually put on my trekking clothes first thing in the morning, but wait with my boots until we set off. First thing you will do is to start hydrate, make sure you have at least 1-2 liters/quarts of water before you start. The breakfast has to be done and eaten, and together with your breakfast don't forget your high quality multi vitamins and vitamin C tablets. During breakfast or before you put your boots on you'll have to check your feet for blisters, chafing etc. Put your boots on and you're ready to go.

Jungle Trekking

During the trek you only have to be aware if anything starts to feel like blisters or chafing. If you start to feel any pain or discomfort, stop immediately, and then I mean immediately, and check your feet. In this environment small blisters, chafings or discomfort turns really fast into something nasty. If your feet stop working, you'll be stuck, no one will carry you out. So one of the most important things to do is to keep your feet happy and comfortable. During the day you will have short breaks, around 10 minutes, during these

short breaks I'll never remove my boots, unless I have something I need to inspect.

Lunch

The first thing I do when we stop for lunch is to take off my boots and socks, just to dry my feet. I always have a pair of flip-flops, which I use whenever I don't have my boots on. I never use my rain poncho during the treks, because it will never last for very long. But if it rains when we stop for lunch I put my poncho on and stick my bare feet in under the poncho and try to dry them, even though we put a tarp up. If you're having big trouble with your feet, now is the time to use foot powder to dry them out. Don't forget along with your lunch your high quality multi vitamins and vitamin C tablets.

When we stop for the day to set camp, the second thing I do is to take off my boots, the first thing is to pitch my hammock.

Jungle Trekking

See jungle trekking above.

Getting ready for the night

When we set camp for the night we do that around 1500/3pm, because it gets pitch black at 1800/6pm. Everything you want to have done like pitching your hammock, making dinner, wash your clothes and yourself, has to be done before it gets dark. When we stop for the day to set camp, the second thing I do is to ta-



ke off my boots, the first thing is to pitch my hammock. If I need to patch my feet up I do that either when I make dinner or when we sit by the fire and just having a good time. I usually also give them a massage too. Before I go to sleep inside my hammock, I'll have my last routine for my feet, and that is to use foot powder to dry them out. When I get athlete's foot, because we never talk about if we get it, this is the time to put it on, and use the sort you only put on once a day.

I would say that this is the daily routine when it comes to foot care in jungle environment.

Vitamins & Minerals

Before foods can give you energy and stamina, hundreds of chemical reactions must take place, involving 28 vitamins and minerals.

Without those essential micro-nutrients, the human body can't unlock the potential energy in food. One-third of all chemical reactions in our bodies are dependent on tiny quantities of minerals, and even more on vitamins.

If just one of any of these nutrients is missing, vitality, energy and peak athletic performance are just not possible!

Apart from all this above there is one more important thing with getting all the nutrient and that is it's easier for your body to heal wounds and keep the immune system up and running. Since it's a bit hard to get all the right nutrient when you're in the jungle I always recommend to eat high quality multi vitamins and some extra C-vitamin tablets, during your trek.

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What to do if you get Leeches

Leeches are not dangerous in it self. The problem is when you get it off. Yes I know it's not the best feeling when you have a worm sucking your blood.

So how do you get it off? Simply use a fingernail or a small blunt object and peel it off.

In the beginning I did what seemed so easy. By using a lighter. I slowly moved the flame towards the leech and he would detach all by himself. But there is a risk that the leech might vomit into the wound, and carry a disease, before he let go, and that opposes some other risks, like infections.

It's the anticoagulant Hirudin that will not stop the bleeding at first.

When the leech is off, wash the wound with soap and water and bandage it. Don't scratch the wound, you might introduce other infections.

How to prevent Athlete's Foot

- Keep your feet dry
- Use socks made of synthetic materials designed to remove moisture
- Wear well ventilated footwear
- Change socks frequently
- Wear sandals while walking through communal areas such as gym showers and locker rooms

As soon as you feel any discomfort, halt and take off your boot and take care of it

This is what the doctors are saying on how we should prevent Athlete's Foot, how many applies to us? But this is what we can do:

1. Keep our feet dry for almost 12hours a day
2. Use socks made of synthetic materials
3. Well ventilated footwear

[More info on Athlete's Foot](#)



How to prevent Jungle Rot/ Tropical Ulcer

- Adequate footwear is important to prevent trauma
- General good health and nutrition reduce ulcer risk
- Adequate and prompt cleansing and treatment of ankle and leg skin breaks
- Improving hygiene and nutrition help to prevent tropical ulcers

[More info on Jungle Rot/ Tropical Ulcer](#)

Jungle Foot Care for Short:

1. Every day wash and clean your feet with biodegradable all-purpose soap
2. Complement your food with high quality multi vitamins and vitamin C
3. Massage your feet, it's nice and it feels so much better
4. When you have a longer break like lunch, take your boots off and dry your feet, if you have any problems with your feet dry your feet with foot powder
5. As soon as you feel any discomfort, halt and take off your boot and take care of it
6. If you get a blister dry it and then put a Band-Aid blister on. Don't open it because of the risk for infections. But if it's filled with fluid, empty it with a needle, put some disinfectant on, let it dry and put a Band-Aid blister on.
7. When you have athlete's foot apply every night your once a day fungus cream
8. Every night inspect your feet
9. Every night dry out your feet with foot powder

When you have a longer break like lunch, take your boots off and dry your feet, if you have any problems with your feet dry your feet with foot powder



Basic Medical Kit for your feet

This is what I recommend you bring for your feet:

- Sharp and pointed straight nail scissors
- Surgical tape
- Disinfectant
- Band-Aid blister
- Fungus cream, like Lamisil, make sure to buy the cream you only put on once a day
- Foot powder





Socks



This will be a short chapter on socks.

First of all it's up to you if you will wear socks at all, but I suggest that you at least bring one pair if anything happens with your feet.

Never use cotton or wool socks in the jungle, microorganisms and bacteria thrives in natural fibers. I have tried synthetic wicking materials like CoolMax® but couldn't really feel any difference from other synthetic socks. Sometimes people use two pair of socks to reduce the risk for blisters, if you want to do that I would suggest you to use a very thin sock next to your skin, and on top of that a thicker pair. When I use socks in my boots I usually wear a thicker cushioned one.

I might be slow but I have tried a lot of different gear in the jungle, and some of it turned out to be not so good. Please take my advice to never use a pair of compression socks for advanced jungle trekking. Well the idea is good but the socks are bad. Try to put on a wet pair after lunch, it's almost impossible, and after 2-3 days in wet conditions your fingertips start to get sore, well let's say it's not enjoyable anymore.

If you are the compression sock type, try to look for compression calf sleeves, such as 2XU.

I always carry a pair of compression calf sleeves in my backpack. Sometimes I use them during the night for recovery. Once when I slipped on a large log and got a pretty severe contusion on my right shinbone, I

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first used disinfectant and then patched it up because the skin was burst, and when the contusion started to swell, I took out my compression calf sleeve and put it on as a compression bandage.

The best socks are those that you feel comfortable in and don't get you blisters.

For jungle environment avoid these socks:

- Natural fiber socks, such as cotton and wool
- Compression socks



Boots



Footwear

What you will be wearing on your jungle trek is up to you and your feet and the duration of your trek. On a one day trek you can use sneakers or flip-flops, because you won't get to the real deal.

I know that people are arguing back and forth if you should use military jungle boots or not, and here is what I think, use whatever works for your feet. I have tried both military and non military boots, trekking shoes. It's important that you find a pair of well built high quality boots/shoes, that will protect your feet/toes and support your ankles from all kinds of battering.

They need to be well drained or at least it should not keep water on the inside. Right now I'm using a pair of New Balance Tactical 451 Jungle Lite. With these boots it actually feels like someone have been in the jungle. They are protected on the right places, such as the toes, and they are well drained with three drainage holes on each side of the boot. They are well built and have lasted a couple of expeditions.

A couple of years ago I ended up in a discussion with a boot company selling jungle boots. They offered a pretty expensive jungle boot which was waterproof with gore-tex. I asked the guy why they had bothered making it waterproof, since it's a jungle boot. He told me that that it's good because otherwise you can get problems with your feet, being wet all

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day. Nooo, is that so? The discussion wasn't going anywhere so I thanked him and left. Obviously neither him nor the boot maker has ever been deep inside the jungle. So the next time we went on an expedition into the rainforests of the Philippines I took this picture, just to show. Crossing creeks and rivers are not something you seldom do, this is something you will be doing quite often. I sent him the picture and explained, but he never got back to me. The boot company still sell the jungle boot.

I heard about one guy from Europe who wanted to set up a jungle trekking company. It was probably his first time in the jungle when he tried to trek in sandals, it took him about two days until he stepped on a splinter from a fallen tree, and the wound got infected, so he couldn't walk anymore, he had to send his guide for help. They had to bring him out with a helicopter.

Fitting

When you lace your boot they are supposed to be tight but not too tight, they have to be comfortable, your heel has to be tight in the heel cup so it cannot slip, because if your feet can slide just a little bit when you've laced it, you'll soon get some chafings and blisters.

My toes and probably yours too, need space inside the boot. I suggest 1.5cm/0.5in to 2.5cm/1in room in your boot/shoe.

So let's be clear about this, no matter how deep-tread outsole you have or what type of structure the boot/shoe have, they will be slippery on mud

Material

Never consider shoes with mesh, yes they drain the water very well, but do not give any protection for your feet, and the mesh will be ripped pretty soon. It's nice if the boot/shoe is made out of fast drying material, or at least a material that don't keep the water around your lower leg.

Outsoles

So let's be clear about this, no matter how deep-tread outsole you have or what type of structure the boot/shoe have it will be slippery on mud. With a fairly deep-tread outsole you will be good. But the material in the outsole tend to be softer on the boots specialized for the jungle, you tend to wear them out quicker walking on concrete or asphalt.



What to look for when you're buying a pair of jungle boots

- Protect your feet and support your ankles
- Well drained
- Well built
- Fairly deep-tread outsoles
- Enough room for your toes

How to break them in

This is how I break my boots in:

1. Soak them in warm water for a couple of hours
2. Since I know where my hot-spots are, I tape my feet beforehand
3. Put on a nice thick pair of socks, sometimes I even soak the socks in warm water
4. Put the boots on and walk on a forest trail for one to two hours

You can do this every time you're going for a walk. If you're going to use them at work, just soak the socks and tape your feet. After a couple of times I stop taping my feet and even loose the sock, just to toughen my feet. After a while when the boots start to feel really comfortable I stop soaking them and the socks.

But when I'm out walking in the forest and I find a creek or a puddle I just have to get into it.

If the boots don't fit you after a couple of weeks, don't use them again, because they will never fit you.

Sometimes you get a pair of boots that just don't fit your feet, and they probably never will. I have a pair and they always give me chafings and blisters, and then I have boots that never has given me anything but happy feet. I did the Death March in Belgium, 100km/62mi in 24h, with only taped feet and a pair of thick wool socks, in almost a new pair of boots, they did nothing to my feet. If the boots don't fit you after a couple of weeks, don't use them again, because they will never fit you.



The Path



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