LIGHTNING™ TRAIL SNOWSHOES

Review – Jun 22, 2016

I love these snowshoes, despite their price. This is the tenth winter I've used them and they are holding up well. The winter season is ending so look for these snowshoes on clearance. These snowshoes come in two sizes, 22 and 25 inch. Everything is a compromise and snowshoe size is no exception. In many parts of the country the snow can be wet and heavy and these snowshoes excel in those conditions. If you travel in deep powder often then you would probably want the longer model. I have the 22″ model and the actual weight is 3# 4 oz. In contrast, I have a 30″ pair of Yakima snowshoes that weigh 5# 3 oz. On the occasions you need more flotation then buy the tails for them which will extend the 22 inch snowshoes to 27 inches and add 9.5 ounces in weight. Also, if you buy the tails be sure to get a demonstration on how to put them on because it isn't intuitive. I am so glad that I spent the extra money to buy the carrying bag to keep my snowshoes together and any accessories.

I've used several brands of snowshoes, including rawhide snowshoes, which have an aesthetic appeal. I've made my own snowshoes out of pvc pipe and inner tubes for the do-it-yourself appeal.

I look for snowshoes to be rugged and reliable and these fit the bill. When evaluating snowshoes pay close attention to snowshoe bindings. If any one part of the binding breaks or fails, can you still make the binding serviceable? Are there enough straps so that if one breaks can you still walk back out to the trailhead? The MSR snowshoes are well constructed and thought out. The binding is the best I've seen on the market. With winter gloves on, you can get in and out of the bindings. You can also undo the two heel straps and step out of them then later step back into them and only fasten the heel strap. The bindings are sturdy and wet snow doesn't stick to the bindings or the decking.

These snowshoes offer great traction on almost any surface. You'll appreciate the small amount of snow the tails kick up as you walk. As with any snowshoe, care should be taken when walking over rocks because that will dull the points or puncture the deck. The points on these showshoes can be easily sharpened with some filing.

Weight is an important factor if you intend to walk more than a couple of miles a day. Think of strapping a can of green beans to each foot and walking around all day. Now think about two cans of green beans on each foot. That can be the difference between brands of showshoes. Lighter is supremely better.

When you strap your feet in, they stay where you put them and don't slip sideways in the bindings. The binding pivot is limited enough so you can step backwards, but you do have to pick your feet up a lot. The snowshoes are sturdy enough you can jump across ditches without warping the snowshoes.

These bindings also allow you to side-hill without your foot twisting or the snowshoe trying to match the angle of the slope. There are teeth all around the snowshoe to hold fast in all but loose snow on steep hills. The aluminum and synthetic decking material combine to provide a fairly quiet backcountry experience. Compare these to snowshoes with plastic decking on icy snow for noise level. Also beware of bindings that may squeak during use. My bindings are different than the current bindings but they still work well.

The only wear I can see is the exterior paint finish is chipping off in places and the decking is a tiny bit frayed where my boot has rubbed but this doesn’t decrease the functionality of this snowshoe. I did take my bindings apart once to grease the pins to stop some squeaking.

Switchback Steve