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Best Trail Running Shoes for Men of 2024

By [Meg Carney](#)



Reviewed by [Marlo Jappen Porto](#)

Updated: April 10, 2024



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Trail running shoes make it easier to navigate difficult trails. Whether you're charting muddy or rocky terrain, the footwear you choose should be protective enough to prevent injury yet lightweight enough to not slow you down.

Meg Carney, the author of this piece and hiker and trail runner of more than a decade, provides expert tips for choosing the best trail running footwear and details her top picks. She also consulted with fitness professionals for further insight into what features make trail running shoes for men stand out.

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Our Top Picks

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- ✓ Dependable and celebrated brand

CONS:

- ✗ Narrow fit
- ✗ On the pricier side

- ✓ Wide midsole platform for stability and support
- ✓ Optimal breathability for long runs
- ✓ Lightweight despite offering plenty of cushioning

Buy From HOKA

The HOKA Speedgoat with its versatility, comfort, and performance is our best overall pick. Offering ample cushioning, these shoes ensure comfort and impact absorption during long runs. Plus, multidirectional lugs deliver exceptional traction for challenging surfaces. The wide midsole platform maintains stability, contributing to a confident stride on rugged terrain.

Durability with [HOKAs](#) is a standout feature, with reinforced overlays and a robust outsole. The mesh upper promotes breathability, keeping the feet cool and dry during intense runs. Despite its supportive structure, the shoe remains relatively lightweight, enhancing agility on the trails.

However, some users may find the fit too narrow, especially in the toe box area.

Overall, the HOKA Speedgoat 5 stands out for its combination of cushioning, traction, and durability, making it a solid choice for trail runners seeking reliable performance on diverse terrains.

Specs:

List Price:	\$155
Weight:	10.3 ozs
Drop:	4 mm
Sizes:	7-15

Buy From HOKA »

Best Budget

Brooks Cascadia 16 »



PROS:

- ✓ Durable construction for an affordable price
- ✓ Well-rounded and versatile trail shoe
- ✓ Lightweight yet supportive
- ✓ Highly breathable upper

CONS:

- ✗ Narrow toe box
- ✗ Long break-in period

[Buy From Amazon](#)

The Brooks Cascadia 16 is a versatile and reliable trail running shoe, delivering a blend of cushioning, stability, and durability. It's more affordable than the Brooks Cascadia 17, the newest iteration of this model, but both

shoes are engineered to perform on everything from smooth dirt paths to technical trails. By purchasing the 16, you get a highly technical trail running shoe at a budget price.

Ample cushioning ensures comfort and support during long-distance runs, while the rugged outsole with multidirectional lugs provides exceptional traction. The 3D Fit Print upper and Pivot Post system contribute to stability and control.

Constructed with durable materials, the Cascadia 16 is built to withstand the rigors of trail running and is sturdy enough for long-distance runs. The mesh upper promotes breathability, allowing airflow to keep the feet cool and dry even during intense runs. Despite its supportive structure, the shoe remains relatively lightweight, facilitating agility on challenging terrain.

Some users may find the fit too narrow or snug, particularly in the toe box area, so a break-in period may be required to optimize comfort.

Specs:

List Price:	Starting at \$74.99
Weight:	10.5 ozs
Drop:	8 mm
Sizes:	7-12.5

[Buy From Amazon »](#)

Best for Long Distance

Nnormal Kjerag »

**PROS:**

- ✓ Lightweight
- ✓ Extreme grip
- ✓ Durable design
- ✓ Technical yet comfortable cushioning and support

CONS:

- ✗ High price point
- ✗ Tight and narrow midfoot

[Buy From NNormal](#)

The Nnormal Kjerag trail [running shoe](#) is a sturdy and dependable option for outdoor enthusiasts looking for an ultralight trail shoe. It has excellent traction on varied terrain, making it suitable for rugged trails and long distances. The shoe's aggressive lugs ensure a reliable grip, providing stability and confidence even on slippery surfaces.

The shoe's reinforced design offers protection from trail hazards, enhancing the wearer's confidence during challenging runs. The Nnormal Kjerag trail running shoe is a solid choice for outdoor enthusiasts seeking lightweight

durability and traction. Its robust construction and reliable grip make it dependable for different types of terrain.

Specs:

List Price:	\$195
Weight:	8.05 ozs
Drop:	Drop: 6 mm
Sizes:	4.5-13.5

[Buy From NNormal »](#)

Best for Steep Climbs

La Sportiva Ultra Raptor II »



PROS:	CONS:
✓ Ergonomic design	✗ Narrow toe box

suitable for alpine runs

✖ Heavy

- ✔ Aggressive traction
- ✔ Excellent stability and control
- ✔ Designed for technical and rocky surfaces

Buy From La Sportiva

The La Sportiva Ultra Raptor II is a reliable match for trail runners seeking performance on steep terrain. Designed for technical and rocky surfaces, these shoes boast a durable and protective construction that can withstand rugged terrain with ease and optimal stability.

Ample cushioning offers comfort and support during long-distance runs. At the same time, the brand’s grippy outsole and Impact Brake System, which features lugs with slanted and opposing angles to reduce impact, provide stability and control, delivering reliable grip and traction on challenging surfaces.

This pair’s mesh upper promotes breathability. The ergonomic design and padded tongue improve a comfortable fit, reducing the risk of chafing or discomfort during extended wear.

The La Sportiva Ultra Raptor II boasts versatility, durability, and performance, making it a solid choice for trail runners tackling steep technical terrain.

Specs:

List Price:	\$149
Weight:	12.5 ozs
Drop:	9 mm
Sizes:	6-15.5

Buy From La Sportiva »

Best for Wet Conditions

Saucony Peregrine 13 GTX »



PROS:

- ✓ Gore-Tex Waterproofing
- ✓ Decent breathability despite waterproofing
- ✓ Reinforced toe box and rock plate
- ✓ Comfortable fit for extended wear

CONS:

- ✗ A bit heavy for long runs
- ✗ Narrow toe box

[Buy From Saucony](#)

The Saucony Peregrine 13 GTX is a reliable trail shoe with durable waterproof protection. It features GTX (Gore-Tex) technology, which provides exceptional waterproofing against wet and muddy conditions. The shoe's

construction with durable materials and aggressive lugs delivers reliable traction on various trail terrains.

Despite its waterproofing, the Peregrine 13 GTX maintains adequate breathability but isn't the best during extended wear. The padded collar and tongue, along with a cushioned midsole, provide a comfortable fit for prolonged use. Even with the comfortable feel, the reinforced toe cap and rock plate provide plenty of protection.

Potential drawbacks include the shoe's higher price point than non-waterproof options, weight, and potential fit issues, especially in the toe box area.

Specs:

List Price:	\$160
Weight:	10.1 ozs
Drop:	4 mm
Sizes:	7-14

[Buy From Saucony »](#)

Best for Wide Feet

Altra Lone Peak 7 »

**PROS:**

- ✓ Roomy design for natural foot movement
- ✓ Wide toe box
- ✓ Forefoot rock plate

CONS:

- ✗ Zero drop takes time to get used to
- ✗ Durability can be improved

[Buy From Altra](#)

The Altra Lone Peak 7 stands out as a top choice among ultra-distance runners and hikers. Well-known for its exceptional comfort and durability, it has 23 millimeters of cushioning across the midsole and an expansive toe box. The design facilitates natural foot movement and toe splay, aiding in strengthening foot muscles. The stitchless upper ensures a snug yet accommodating fit, striking a perfect balance between support and unrestricted movement.

With its zero-drop design, which means that the heel and the forefront of the shoe are at the same height, the Lone Peak 7 promotes a natural posture. Zero-drop running shoes aren't for everyone and require an adjustment period for individuals who are new to this type of footwear. While the absence of heel cushioning can initially strain the Achilles tendon, consistent

training can mitigate discomfort over time. Overall, the Lone Peak 7 is an excellent fit for runners and hikers needing a wide trail shoe that prioritizes foot health, natural movement, and comfort.

Specs:

List Price:	\$160
Weight:	11 ozs
Drop:	0 mm
Sizes:	7-16

[Buy From Altra »](#)

Best Zero-Drop

Xero Shoes Mesa Trail WP »



PROS:

- ✔ Zero-drop construction
- ✔ Lightweight yet durable design
- ✔ Waterproof
- ✔ Adequate traction for most trail conditions

CONS:

- ✘ May not be suited for steep or highly technical terrain
- ✘ Limited color options

Buy From Amazon

The Xero Shoes Mesa Trail WP is ideal for runners looking for a minimalist, barefoot shoe design that’s tough enough to take on their favorite trails. Its waterproofing technology adds protection against the elements, making it a suitable option for running in wet and rainy conditions. Additionally, its durable materials give it resilience against rugged terrain and still falls within the standard Xero Shoe 500-mile warranty.

The Mesa Trail WP provides reliable traction on various surfaces, courtesy of its grippy outsole. Despite its durability and waterproofing, the shoe maintains a lightweight profile, facilitating agility and responsiveness on the trails. The padded collar and tongue and a cushioned midsole offer ample comfort.

While some users may find that zero-drop running shoes take time to get used to, this pair is still an excellent choice for individuals seeking a reliable, waterproof trail shoe that delivers low-profile performance and comfort.

Specs:

List Price:	\$139.99
Weight:	9.6 ozs
Drop:	0 mm
Sizes:	6.5-15

[Buy From Amazon »](#)

The Bottom Line

Selecting the right trail running shoe is essential for maximizing performance, comfort, and safety. Whether you prioritize cushioning, traction, or support, numerous options are available to suit your needs and preferences. We chose the HOKA Speedgoat 5 as our top pick because it's fit for various types of terrain, from rocky to wet surfaces. Though this shoe offers plenty of cushioning, we still found it to be lightweight and breathable.

Things To Consider When Buying Trail Running Shoes

A well-suited trail running shoe prioritizes fit, traction, and protective features. Factors like running style, terrain type, and weather conditions are pivotal in determining the most suitable shoe design.

In the sections below, we delve into the crucial aspects to consider when searching for trail running shoes that fit your unique running needs.

Types of Trail Runners: According to Brian Metzler, an editorial running shoe tester since 1998 and author of the book *Kicksology*, there are three main categories of trail running shoes:

1. Road to Trail Crossover
2. "Do Everything" Trail Runner
3. Mountain Shoe

Each shoe category has distinct differences, primarily in durability, cushion, traction, and overall protection. Most trail running shoes tend to fall within the second

category due to their number of variations and versatility, which fits most runners' needs.

Size and Fit: Ensuring proper size and fit for men's trail running shoes is crucial for comfort, optimal performance, and to mitigate injury risks. Dana Vander Wal, an athletic trainer who frequently encounters running-related injuries, emphasizes the impact shoe selection can have on injury prevention.

According to Vander Wal, common running injuries include

- [Plantar fasciitis](#)
- Shin splints
- Calf strains
- [Achilles tendon strains](#)
- Peroneal tendonitis
- Stress fractures
- Ankle/foot sprains.

Metzler adds that other common injuries from trail running may be caused by "stepping awkwardly on a rock" or "scuffing a large boulder with the side of your foot." According to Vander Wal and Metzler, the best place to start is to measure both feet, utilizing online sizing guides or seeking assistance from knowledgeable shoe experts at a local running store. Factors such as toe length, foot width, and arch height influence shoe fit and comfort during running.

When trying on shoes, try to keep about a thumb's width of space between your longest toe and the shoe's end to accommodate potential swelling and downhill running. Assess the fit across the forefoot, midfoot, and heel, aiming for a snug yet comfortable feel. Experiment with various lacing techniques to further customize the fit. Test shoes later in the day when your feet may be slightly swollen, and wear your typical running socks for a realistic assessment. Finally, walk or jog around the store to evaluate comfort, stability, and potential pressure points.

All of these factors can influence trail running shoe fit, and according to Vander Wal, "Shoes too big or too small, any improper fit, and shoes not made for running tend to be the biggest culprits for shoes causing injuries."

Weight: The appropriate weight for men's trail running shoes hinges on running style, terrain, and personal preferences. Lighter footwear enhances agility and responsiveness, ideal for fast-paced runs and technical trails. A lighter weight minimizes fatigue during extended distances while fostering a more natural running experience. However, lighter options may compromise durability and protection, especially on rugged terrain or when bearing heavier loads.

Heavier shoes offer increased stability, support, and defense against challenging terrain and obstacles. They cater to runners who prioritize longevity and cushioning for prolonged outings and comfort. Assess your running requirements, preferences, and trail conditions to strike a balance between weight, performance, and comfort. Experiment with weights and styles to identify the most suitable shoe.

Materials and Durability: Seek out trail running shoes crafted from resilient yet lightweight materials that can endure abrasion while providing the desired level of breathability. The outsole composition and tread pattern should prioritize traction and often will have multidirectional patterns. Shoes featuring protective elements like toe caps and rock plates can help defend against rocks, roots, and debris.

Metzler notes that injuries from trail features like rocks, roots, and uneven surfaces are prevalent in trail running. To mitigate these risks, opt for trail running shoes with a design focusing on durability, lug outsoles, and integrated rock plates. Many trail running shoe models may include a reinforced upper to shield against sidewall abrasions and a reinforced toe box to prevent stubbed toes or impacts.

Consider the stitching and construction quality, as they significantly impact a shoe's longevity in challenging conditions. While heavier-duty options may excel in durability, they compromise agility and responsiveness. Most trail running shoes can withstand several hundred miles before showing signs of wear, so seek out manufacturer predictions or mileage ratings for insight into their expected lifespan. Vander Wal emphasizes that "Runners need to remember that after 300 to 400 miles, you want to get new shoes. Older or worn-out shoes tend to create injuries."

Cushioning and Support: Shoes with generous midsole cushioning are engineered to absorb impact, providing effective shock absorption when running. This cushioning alleviates strain on joints and muscles during extended runs, although the ideal amount varies according to personal preference.

According to Metzler, the amount of cushioning desired in a trail running shoe depends on comfort and foot maneuverability. Thin shoes, lighter and geared towards shorter distances, offer less protection, leaving feet more exposed. Conversely, higher levels of cushioning can enhance comfort and energy return and protect against trail hazards.

When choosing cushion support levels, consider pronation type and arch height, opting for shoes featuring appropriate stability elements such as medial posts or arch support for those who overpronate, meaning their ankle rolls inward and downward with each step.

Emphasize a snug and secure fit around the heel and midfoot to prevent slippage and bolster stability on uneven terrain. Experiment with various shoe models and brands to find cushioning that supports your preferences.

Drop: The preferred drop of a trail running shoe depends on factors such as running style, foot biomechanics, and personal preferences. The drop, which refers to the height difference between the heel and forefoot of the shoe, plays a crucial role in determining running mechanics and comfort.

A higher drop typically promotes heel striking and may appeal to runners seeking more cushioning and support under the heel. A lower drop encourages a more natural midfoot or forefoot strike, offering a minimalist or responsive feel.

Metzler mentions that "lower cushioning provides a better feel of the trail, and there's a special foot-to-brain awareness or proprioceptive feel. The more experienced or more agile-oriented running you're doing, the more you need that feel."

Transitioning to minimalist or zero-drop shoes requires caution, especially for inexperienced runners. Vander Wal recommends easing into such shoes gradually to avoid injuries or setbacks. Individual running mechanics and injury history must be considered. While zero-drop shoes can reduce the risk of certain injuries, they may exert additional stress on other muscle groups.

Understanding the types of trails you're running most often is the biggest cue to selecting a pair of trail shoes with the right needs and features (cushion, protection, weight, etc.).

Lugs and Traction: The lugs and traction of trail running shoes play a pivotal role in maintaining stability and grip across diverse terrain. As noted by Metzler, while road running shoes suffice for certain trails, trail running shoes offer superior traction and protection, lowering energy and effort expenditure while running.

When selecting shoes, consider the rocky, muddy, or technical terrain and opt for lugs tailored to those conditions. Choose shoes with aggressive, multidirectional lugs for rugged trails, ensuring maximum traction and grip on loose or uneven surfaces. Look for deeper lugs crafted from durable rubber compounds for enhanced durability and traction on challenging terrain.

The spacing and pattern of the lugs, along with the flexibility of the outsole, impact traction and responsiveness.

How We Chose the Best Trail Running Shoes

The author, Meg Carney, is an experienced trail runner and hiker, putting in trail miles in remote locations across the U.S. As someone who either trail runs or hikes almost daily, she has gone through several pairs of running shoes and worked her way around different styles and features to find the best-fitting options for her feet. Additionally, Carney consulted with Brian Metzler, an editorial running shoe tester since 1998 and author of the book [Kicksology](#), and [Dana Vander Wal](#), an athletic trainer with a background in running-based sports and pre-therapy kinesiology.

WHY SHOULD YOU TRUST US?

The author of this piece, [Meg Carney](#), brings over seven years of expertise in researching, writing, editing, and producing content within the outdoor recreation sector. Her background encompasses extensive testing and reviewing of a diverse range of footwear options tailored for outdoor activities, including running shoes, hiking boots, hiking sandals, and rain boots. Carney's experience combined with expert interviews provides valuable insights into the nuances of trail running shoes, ensuring comprehensive coverage and informed recommendations for readers seeking the best gear for their outdoor pursuits.

FAQ

What's the difference between hiking shoes and trail running shoes?



How long do trail running shoes last?



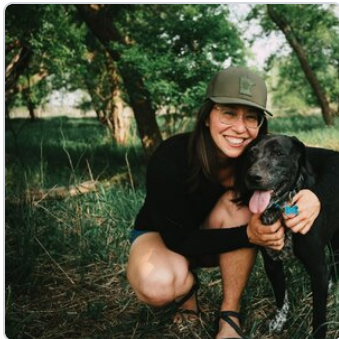
Are trail running shoes waterproof?



What is a rock plate?



About Our Team



Meg Carney

Contributor



Meg Carney is an outdoor and environmental writer with a passion for environmental advocacy. She primarily covers topics within the outdoor industry ranging from the best new products and greenwashing to the scientific coverups of hazardous chemicals. Her work can be found in digital publications such as Field and Stream, Popular Mechanics, and GearJunkie, and her environmental journalism extends into

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Marlo Jappen Porto is a former editor for U.S. News 360 Reviews, focusing on home goods. Prior to joining the team, she was a researcher at NBCUniversal, where she gathered compelling and relevant archival content for live broadcasts. In addition, she has spent years working as an editor and community journalist.

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