



SNOWSHOES

In case you haven't been paying attention, there's a bit of a snowshoe renaissance going on. Participation is way up, and there's now a pair designed for every kind of winter hiking. To vet the best of the season, we sent our testers—everyone from runners to expedition-load haulers to slow-and-steady types—tromping out onto deep, dry powder, sticky slush, and heinous hardpacked slopes. Amid the slogging, one shoe sped to the front of the pack with do-it-all versatility, ease of adjustment, and stable footing in the trickiest terrain: Our Gear of the Year-winning Easton Artica Backcountry.

By Berne Broudy

Easton Artica Backcountry (2 lbs; 21 1/2", 30") \$260 eastonsnowshoes.com

1. From backyard strolls to backwoods epics, the Backcountry was our favorite all-purpose snowshoe. Its frame is really two pieces of aluminum alloy held together at the toe and heel by sturdy, flexible plastic, so the deck self-adjusts to tricky terrain. The inner tail is streamlined to allow a more natural stride on casual strolls but leaves

enough float for overnighting with a pack.

2. Like the traction control on a car, two aggressive, pivoting crampons near the toes deliver more grip to the inside or outside of the boot, wherever it's needed most. Despite all the moving parts, testers reported a snug, secure fit that gave them confidence

even when traversing steep hills. The binding's contoured padding comfortably locks in your boots, and a pivot-clip keeps the toes from banging your third midstrike.

3. All the little extras add up, too. A heel pull-tab makes getting these shoes on and off hassle free, even with gloves. Testers said the

bouncy, shock-absorbing plastic heel pad sprung them into each step—and they loved that the shoes are 80 percent recyclable, though they're clearly built to endure many hard seasons. Bummer: Several testers lamented the lack of a heel lifter, which would have helped reduce fatigue on steep climbs.

