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THE MOUNTAIN ISSUE:
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FEATURED INSIDE.



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Kayland Vertigo High

Light, dry, and nimble, this boot was our favorite among 110 models we tested this year.

Hiking out of Eagle Creek in a rain so persistent it soaked double-bagged food in the bellies of our packs, one editor remarked, "My feet are the only part of me that's dry." That says as much about these all-leather midweights as it does about the Gorge's notorious sogginess.

It also bears out a truism many hikers don't appreciate: Keeping feet dry can depend as much on a boot's breathability as its waterproofing. That's where the Kayland's eVent membrane excels. It proved waterproof through days of stream crossings and wet snow. Yet when several of us misjudged a stream's depth and dunked our feet ankle-deep, we were amazed at how quickly our socks—and the boots—dried. In the dark, humid, rainy cold, there's only one way to dry out a sodden boot: with the heat of your foot. And that works only if the waterproof membrane breathes well enough for moisture to escape. In the most challenging conditions, our Vertigo Highs did just that.

Of six editors who tested the Vertigo, only the one with very wide feet didn't find the fit acceptable; that's an impressively universal last. The boot holds even skinny heels in place, cradles the midfoot, and gives toes wiggle room. It's stiff underfoot, yet flexible where needed, and the curved shape of the sole (aka rocker) allows a natural stride while lending support for 50-pound loads. Comfort was outstanding whether ascending or descending, cruising on easy trail, or scrambling off-trail. From the PCT to Idaho's Seven Devils, the widely spaced outsole lugs gave solid traction on mud and wet snow, while the rubber stuck to greasy log bridges and snow-covered talus.

The Vertigo doesn't have as much midsole cushion as many boots, but the resulting low-to-the-ground platform is reassuringly stable. One editor noted, "I *always* twist my right ankle—but not in these boots." The laces lock to prevent forefoot loosening, and like rock-climbing shoes, they extend to the toes for a custom fit that improves sensitivity. Construction is superb, with an extended rubber rand, few seams, and reinforced leather on the high-abuse outer side. **\$200; men's 7-13, women's 6½-10; 3 lbs. 5 oz. (men's 9); (603) 918-7395; kayland.com. Reader service #104**



Nite Ize Figure 9 Rope Tightener

Never tie (or untie) a trucker's hitch—or any other knot—again.

Applied to camping, the domino effect usually means one disaster cascading to the next until you're a miserable, shivering heap. As in: You forget the stakes, so the fly sags and collects water that drips onto your sleeping bag, soaking it through and ruining a good night of sleep. Bad stuff.

But the Figure 9 sets off a chain reaction of a different sort, one with purely positive results. This tiny, practically weightless (about an ounce) piece of aluminum makes tightening a line a knot- and curse-free task. Which in turn cuts the time and effort it takes to rig a tarp, which keeps you and your gear drier and more comfortable, which makes tarp camping feel more viable, which will cut your pack weight and help you cover more miles. Which will, well, you get the idea. Good stuff.

At a cold, wet campsite on the banks of Wahtum Lake in the Gorge, two editors were able to pitch a kitchen tarp across uneven terrain in a fraction of the time it'd take to wrestle with knots and hitches. Says our editor-in-chief: "Numb fingers? No worries. Adjustments? In seconds. Versatility? You bet—we rigged clotheslines, guylines, roof-rack tiedowns, even bear bags." And just in case you forget how it works, the instructions are laser-etched on the side. Comes in two sizes (for maximum 50-lb. and 150-lb. loads, respectively); you can also order a combo pack with cord. **\$2 (S), \$4 (L); (303) 449-2576; niteize.com. Reader service #105**

