

# Scrambling Footwear

This month, we head to Tryfan Fach in Snowdonia on a quest to find the ultimate boots and shoes for scrambling – read on to find out how we got on...

WORDS PAUL SMITH, CHRIS KEMPSTER PICTURES PAUL SMITH, NIKKI SKINNER

**N**orth Wales is a regular venue for the *Trek & Mountain* test team, and when it came to choosing where we'd be doing the testing for this month's Group Test, it took no more than a few seconds to decide on Tryfan/Tryfan Fach.

It took much longer, however, to whittle down the list of possible shoes and boots that we'd been sent for inclusion in the test – and this in some ways encapsulates the problem when buying footwear for scrambling. Manufacturers and retailers don't particularly market boots and shoes specifically as 'scrambling footwear' and this means that the end user has to survey a whole range of walking boots, mountaineering boots and approach shoes in order to find the right footwear for their purpose.

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that 'approach shoes', which you might wrongly assume are *all* optimised for scrambling, are generally split into two categories – less technical models that are most suited to walking (i.e. the actual approach), and more technical, climbing-orientated shoes that are more suitable for the scrambling itself.

So once we'd weeded out all the boots and shoes that we considered were too 'soft' for scrambling, we sat down with a pot of tea in the Moel Siobad Cafe in Capel Curig to discuss exactly *what* makes a good scrambling boot or shoe...

**Chris:** What sort of features are we looking for in a shoe or boot specifically for scrambling?

**Paul:** I'd be looking for something as close

## TEST TEAM

Meet the Group Test team



**PAUL SMITH**  
Mountaineering Instructor and boss at Rock & Water Adventures, Paul enjoys everything from climbing and rafting, to ski touring and mountain biking.



**NIKKI SKINNER**  
Trek & Mountain's Advertising & Marketing Manager is a keen climber, mountaineer, and trail runner, but her real passion is big mountains.



**CHRIS KEMPSTER**  
Editor Chris is recovering from a broken leg but will be hitting the trails, crags and peaks of the French Alps as soon as his recovery allows.

to a rock shoe as I can get, particularly as the kind of scrambling I'm going to do is probably grade 3 type scrambles or easy rock climbs. I'd be looking for almost the same features as I'd look for in a comfy rock boot – and also something that'll get me to where the scramble is. So I'm looking for a comfy fit, rather than that crushing fit of rock shoes, but also I want to be able to tighten the laces up for

harder sections.

**Chris:** So are we saying that a good scrambling shoe is almost a more comfortable, 'dumbed-down' climbing shoe then?

**Nikki:** I'd say a scrambling shoe is a more technical approach shoe; so you'll be looking at lacing which goes quite low down to the toes to get a good, tight fit; and you're looking for a significant rubber rand that protects the foot and shoe when jamming between rocks.

**Paul:** You're going to be using more climbing techniques (when scrambling) than normal walking, so you'll be edging, – and you'll need good sharp edges on the boots which aren't going to roll, as opposed to a normal walking boot where you tend to have that rolling action. You'll probably want a bit more support, as you'll be spending a lot more time on your inside or outside edges, or on your toes, whereas with a softer boot it flexes and it doesn't have that support.

**Nikki:** ...and something that you can jam into a crack and it'll hold you there. Not too much flex, and reasonably stiff.

**Chris:** That stiffer sole is one of the key features of scrambling boots and shoes.

**Paul:** Yes, but you still need a bit of flexibility to allow you to smear like you would do with a rock shoe, as there might not always be a little foothold or ledge.

**Chris:** Plus you also want to be able to wear them – and be reasonably comfortable in them – for the walk-in too, so they can't be *too* rigid.

1. The North Face Verto Plasma **£110**
2. Millet Trident Guide **£120**
3. Haglöfs Roc Icon **£130**
4. Scarpa Zodiac **£145**
5. Hanwag Badile Combi GTX **£170**
6. Scarpa Rebel Lite **£240**
7. Salewa Rapace GTX **£170**
8. Meindl Alta Via **£245**





Testing the level of grip  
of the boots and shoes  
on wet rock

**“You still need a bit of flexibility to allow you to smear like you would do with a rock shoe, as there might not always be a foothold or ledge”**

A stiff sole is needed  
for confident edging

Laces are important for  
getting a good fit



The latest boots are very light, with stiff and responsive soles

**“I’d nearly always wear a boot, because getting to and from a scramble is where you’re most likely to turn an ankle...”**



**Nikki:** That’s it – they need to fulfil both functions really.

**Chris:** The interesting thing is that this type of footwear isn’t really marketed as ‘scrambling boots’ or ‘scrambling shoes’ are they?

**Nikki:** I guess they are marketed more as ‘approach’ footwear.

**Paul:** I think it’s a cross between the two – the shoe versions tend to be directed as the top-end of a technical approach shoe, whereas the boots tend to be more directed as ‘via ferrata/alpinestyle’, where you’re going to be in them for an extended period of time.

**Chris:** But rather than labelling them as via ferrata/alpine boots, maybe they should be sold as being great for UK scrambling and easy mountaineering.

**Nikki:** I see a scrambling boot as a lightweight alpine boot anyway...

**Paul:** Well it’s interesting looking at the two boots we’ve got here as they are both designed to take a crampon, and for something like an approach to a via ferrata – in the Brenta region, for example, where you’ve got lots of dry glaciers, where you’re getting out a crampon for an hour just to get to the start – they’re brilliant.

**Chris:** Perhaps what differentiates these between more ‘serious’ mountaineering boots is that we’re looking for light weight with these – they tend to weigh less than, say, a pure alpine boot?

**Paul:** ...and also a normal walking boot. A normal walking boot would probably be a bit heavier than these. So in terms of weight it’s probably a scrambling boot first (lightest), a normal walking boot next and then an alpine or winter boot. The thing is not to think of them as cut-down alpine boots... but they kind of are.

**Nikki:** If I was scrambling in the UK in warm weather, I’d want a shoe, but if it was a bit marginal, I’d wear a boot. You want to have dry feet, so if it turns as the British weather often does, you can put on a gaiter and be watertight.

**Paul:** ...whereas I’d usually go the other way. I’d nearly always wear a boot, because getting to and from a scramble is where you’re most likely to turn an ankle – and so it’s added protection and support for crossing that sort of terrain. Whereas, if I was going out to do, say, the Snowdon Horseshoe in the middle of summer, then I might consider a scramble shoe... but it would have to be the middle of summer.

**Nikki:** Though to be honest, some of the boots here are so light and so close-fitting that they almost feel like a shoe.

**Chris:** What about the sole? In terms of the type of rubber used, this is another area that really differentiates this type of footwear from walking boots and shoes...

**Paul:** I’m looking for something that’s a bit sticky but not too plasticky, because the plasticky ones tend to slip on wet rock. And I don’t want the edges to be rolling, because if they roll too much too frequently they wear very quickly, and I want them to last more than one trip!

**Chris:** What else should we be looking for?

**Paul:** Fit is really important. A lot of them tend to be very narrow, and that affects whether they will suit the individual. I tried some on that I thought would be really narrow and would kill my feet, but actually they were a lot better than I was expecting.

**Nikki:** It depends on whether you have a wide or narrow foot, but whichever boot or shoe you choose, you need to feel like you’re in contact with the rock. There’s no point having something that feels like a brick on your foot – there needs to be a certain amount of sensitivity.



**Chris:** And I suppose the more padding you have in the midsole, the less feel you're going to have?

**Nikki:** Yes I think that's probably true. These are low-profile shoes, with a thinner sole than most walking boots.

**Chris:** What about using insoles to adjust the fit?

**Paul:** This is the classic one with any boots isn't it? Most boots have a very poor insole, but you need to use the insoles to actually adjust the fit to suit you – and that may mean putting a heel lifter in there, or putting arch supports in... that's the playing around you need to do to fine-tune

and get a precise fit. I'd quite like manufacturers to not spend the 1p or whatever they spend on the insole and just supply the boots without an insole in the first place.

**Nikki:** For a lot of people it doesn't even occur to them to change the footbed. Everybody's feet are different, and I've ended up fitting boots (*when working for a leading boot company – Ed*) where we've used a tiny bit of card in the bottom, or a little heel lift, and it's amazing what a great fit you can get.

**Chris:** It's crazy really to spend a lot of money on boots and then not spend a little extra time and money getting the best fit.

**Nikki:** You can use the laces to get a different fit too. Not all boots have something that locks the laces, but there's ways of lacing your boots... you can lock it off halfway down for example, and then get a different amount of tightness further up. There's all sorts of things you can do about fit.

**Paul:** Some footbeds are really good... the one with the Haglofs Roc Icon is excellent, but it's something people need to look for.

**Chris:** And maybe people need to think of not just the boot but their whole foot 'system' – and that includes their feet (nails trimmed!), socks, boots and insoles – all working together in harmony. And on that note, let's go and try these boots out!



Rubber on sole is 'sticky'

A good fit will give confidence

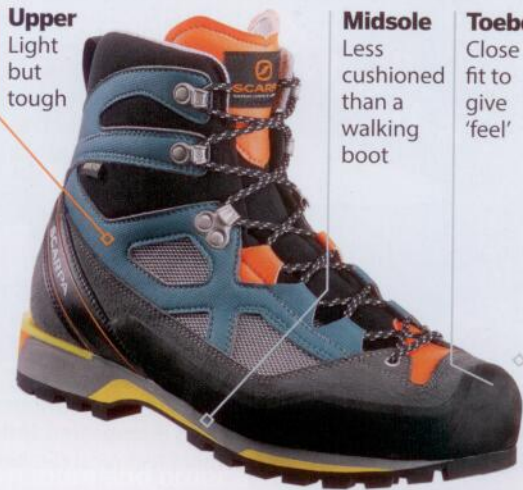


## KEY FEATURES

Some of the main features we are looking for in our test samples

### BOOTS

**Upper**  
Light but tough

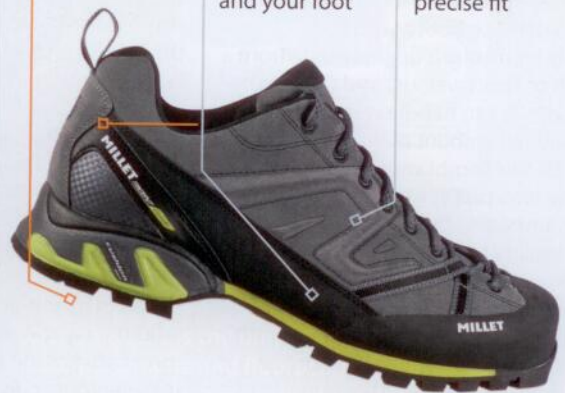


**Midsole**  
Less cushioned than a walking boot

**Toebox**  
Close fit to give 'feel'

### SHOES

**Outsole**  
Fairly stiff but still comfy



**Rand**  
To protect the boot's upper and your foot

**Laces**  
Down to the toe to allow a precise fit



## SCARPA REBEL LITE GTX £240

Rebel Lite comes in great colours for men and women



**N**ew for this year, the Rebel Lite GTX is part of Scarpa's range of lightweight mountain boots which have been developed with input from Ueli Steck. With uppers made from a combination of nylon tech, microfibre, suede perwanger and lined with Gore-Tex, Scarpa have made some serious weight savings – with a single size 44 boot

coming in at just 760g – while at the same time maintaining the features and the functionality that you would expect from a boot designed for scrambling, easy rock climbing and via ferrata.

The Rebel Lite's rubber rand extends from the inside midsole to the outside midsole and a triple-density midsole provides general underfoot shock absorbing comfort, with

traction provided by a Vibram sole unit. The Rebel Lite is crampon compatible and has an in-built crampon ledge that will accept a heel bale as commonly found on step-in crampons. There is plenty of flex in a pair of size 44s, so we suspect that the boot rating is closer to B1 than B2, but this would be more than enough for quick summit raids on snow-covered alpine peaks.

When testing both the male and female versions, all of the testers commented on how soft and comfortable the Rebel Lite felt straight out of the box, with particular emphasis on the nature of the tongue, which is made from elasticated Schoeller fabric – this forms a major part of Scarpa's Sock-Fit system. The shape of the NAG last meant that scrambling in the Rebel Lite, was easy, the boot providing the support required for feet to be continually standing on small edges and footholds, without tiring, almost as well as a specific rock climbing shoe would. The soft rubber around the toe rolls slightly in use, which until it wears down means that the Rebel Lite currently smears well on more technical ground, increasing contact with the rock.

**Verdict:** Lightweight and comfortable, this could be the perfect boot for scrambling, as well as for general 3-season mountain use.

## HANWAG BADILE COMBI GTX £175

**B**ased on their popular Badile boot, Hanwag have produced a more rigid version designed specifically for summer alpine rock climbs, with potential for dealing with short icy sections – the resulting boot is an excellent choice for scrambling. On initial inspection the Badile Combi GTX appeared to be a very narrow fit to our wide-footed testers, but thanks to the lacing that extends all the way to the toes, a personalised fit was easily achieved. Hanwag have used their specific climbing last for the construction of these boots, with the exceptionally lightweight uppers made from a combination of Sportsvelours and Cordura, lined with Gore-Tex to handle waterproofing. There is a minimal amount of insulation making the Badile Combi very much a summer use boot. The two-part rubber rand extends the whole way around the boot, providing additional stability to the design as well as adding to the durability of the boot. Under foot there is a rigid full-length shank and associated heel ledge for accepting a step-in crampon, along with a minimal amount of shock-absorbing material and a Vibram Climbing specific sole unit. The thinness of the sole provided excellent feel and feedback to the user when scrambling, but that also means that you feel every lump and bump while

Badile ticks all the boxes for scrambling



walking in and out to a route. The sole rigidity and the narrow nature of the toe box were a great advantage when you need to use the smaller footholds. The combination of the soft rubber and smooth 'climbing zone' that extends 3 inches on the inside edge from the ball of the big toe around to the front of the boot meant that the Badile Combi smeared

very well, when the more obvious footholds of easier scrambles disappeared and you found yourself on more technical climbing terrain.

**Verdict:** An excellent boot for pure scrambling, but for extended approaches and descents some may find the sole too thin.



## MEINDL ALTA VIA GTX £245

Alta Via features usual Meindl build quality, but it's not light



**M**eindl are aiming their Alta Via GTX boot at anyone intending to use it for demanding trekking or extended hikes in the high mountains where they will encounter poor mountain paths, plenty of scree, and possibly a small amount of via ferrata. The construction of the leather upper means that there is

minimal stitching, a measure that increases both the waterproofness and durability of the boot. The upper is lined with waterproof Gore-Tex and plenty of insulation/cushioning meaning that in use this boot is a warm, comfy and dry. With the lacing extending almost to the toes, and tensioned through a series of eyelets, closed and open hooks, it was very

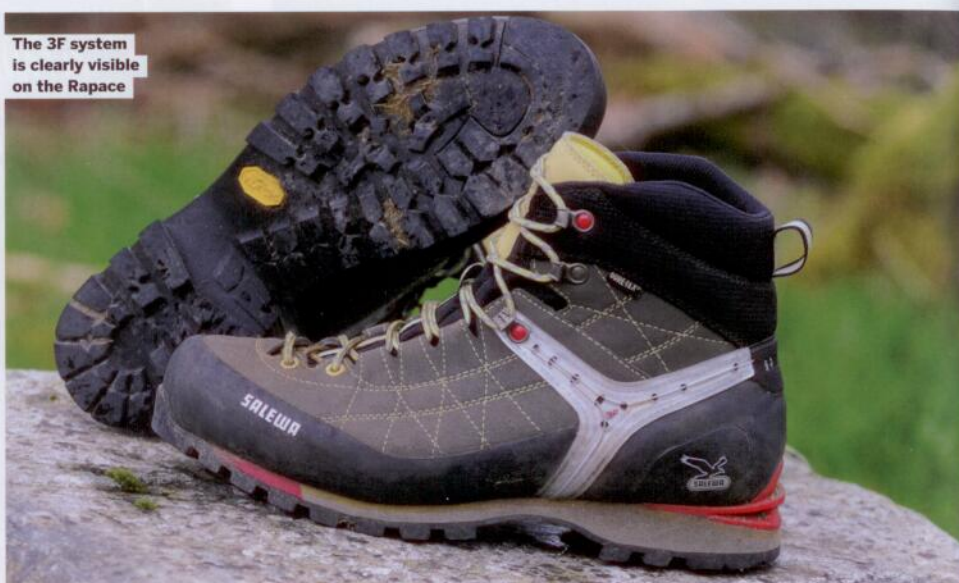
easy to get a close, comfortable fit. A one-piece rubber rand runs all of the way around the boot, and links the upper to the sole unit. The sole unit itself was the thickest in this test and housed Meindl's PU cushioning system, which you can clearly see through the window in the side of the heel.

The aggressive Vibram sole had deep lugs and proved to be excellent in mud, but tended to rip up sections of soft moss which clogged the tread, creating a feeling not unlike a crampon balling up. The build quality was excellent and looks like the Meindl Alta Via GTX will be a boot that will last, but this of course means that there are weight penalties. When used on scrambling terrain, the stiffness of the Alta Via provided excellent support for the whole of the foot when using larger holds, but the deep lugs of the sole meant that standing on smaller holds or even smearing became very tricky. The broad rounded nature of the toe of the boot meant that comfort levels were high, but again using the smaller holds found on more technical terrain became problematic.

**Verdict:** A very comfortable boot more suited to non-winter visits to the mountains, where simple scrambling can be expected.

## SALEWA RAPACE GTX £170

**S**alewa market the Rapace GTX as a lightweight and agile boot, constructed from high-tech materials to make it a great choice for light mountaineering on technical routes. The first thing that you notice is the Y-shaped plastic holder and then the wires of their '3F' system, which are designed to provide lateral support of the ankle, while at the same time allowing freedom of movement. This is welded on to the Cordura uppers that are lined with Gore-Tex. The moulded insert to accept step-in crampons and the mid-stiffness nylon shank provides just enough rigidity and support for use with crampons in non-technical terrain, but there is possibly too much flex for prolonged front-pointing, which meant in use as a scrambling boot you had an appropriate amount of support for movement small holds, but then were able to walk in comfort across broken ground. The use of smaller holds was aided by the use of a Vibram sole with a climbing zone around the big toe. Salewa's unique MFF 'multi-fit foot bed' system allows adjustment and fine tuning of fit to be achieved by adding or taking away the two different Velcro-able layers on the foot bed; while not as supportive or as effective as some of the more commonly available specialist foot bed makers, but when combined with the



The 3F system is clearly visible on the Rapace

'down to the toe' lacing system, a good fit can be achieved. Out of all of the footwear on test the sizing did feel slightly on the small side, particularly around the toe box.

In use the light weight of the boot was noticeable during approaches and even more so on descents, while the precision, feel and grip of the sole unit during scrambling was

excellent in a combination of both dry and moist conditions. The comfort levels, out of the box, meant that very little breaking in would be required, if any at all.

**Verdict:** A very capable scrambling boot, if the fit around the toes are correct for your feet.



## SCARPA ZODIAC £145

A striking-looking shoe with an extremely stiff sole



Another new product from Scarpa is the Zodiac, a seriously sturdy shoe that has features that you would normally expect on a full mountain boot. The BN lasts of the Zodiac is a technical last designed to strike a balance between a precise fit for scrambling and climbing precision along with comfort for all day

walking. The most obvious feature of the Zodiac is the 1.88mm bright orange suede upper, which is water resistant and tough, with rands at both heel and toe. The toe rand is made from a softer rubber and is similar to what you find on a climbing shoe, while the heel is a made from a much tougher material that also forms some of the support for the

heel. But cleverest part of the Zodiac is hidden behind the wide asymmetric toe-length lacing system (which itself ensures a precise fit is achievable) – Scarpa's Sock-Fit. Instead of having a tough tongue as is normal, Scarpa are using elasticated Schoeller fabric, more commonly used in trousers, to create a comfortable close-fitting system that keeps your foot in place. Underfoot there is a dual density PU injected midsole, finished off with the same Vibram sole with a 'climbing zone' as the Hanweg and Salewa boots.

Initially the Zodiac took a bit of getting use to; this was due to the shoe being as stiff as a B1 boot but with much more freedom of movement due to the lack of ankle support. The support on small footholds was excellent, yet it was just about flexible enough to be possible to smear. Both comfort and fit were excellent, but the stiffness of the sole meant feet tended to get tired, particularly around the arches, when using the Zodiacs for more general approach shoes type activities.

**Verdict:** Excellent footwear choice for summer scrambling – it's like wearing a boot but without the ankle cuff – but some may not like the stiffness of the sole for more general approach shoe use.

## HAGLOFS ROC ICON GT £130

Based on the pure scrambling and climbing shoe, the Legend, Haglofs have listened to feedback and developed the Roc Icon – a waterproof approach shoe that can get you to your route, up it and back again in comfort. With an upper constructed from 1.6 to 1.8 mm water repellent suede leather and lined with Gore-Tex, the most striking feature is the contrasting coloured asymmetric laces that run nearly all of the way down to the rubber toe rand, which extends around the front half of the shoe. Between the foot and the Vibram sole is EVA cushioning under the forefoot with a PU wedge at the rear. The sole itself is pretty thin and sticky, having plenty of flat areas for climbing particularly around the inside and outside edges of the front of the foot.

Haglofs need to be applauded as the insole of the Rock Icon is one of the best that we have seen supplied as standard with a shoe. It is designed with an orthopaedic shape that supports the whole foot, stops the arch collapsing and prevents harmful, uneven loading by adapting to your individual foot shape. With a comfortable fit achieved straight from the box, thanks to the lacing system and the insole, the Roc Icon was very supportive of the foot on the approach and then performed with ease

Great looking, comfortable and agile on rock



on a wet 'Difficult' graded multi-pitch rock climb. The thin sole provided plenty of feel and feedback from the rock as well as maintaining a higher than expected level of friction given the conditions underfoot. The small rubber bumper on the tip of the toes did cause a few small issues when trying to use very small footholds as it stopped the front

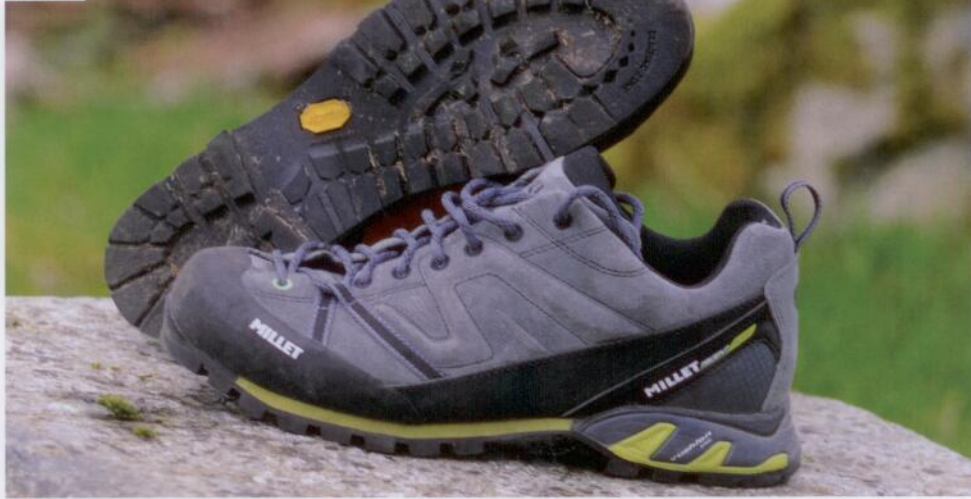
edge of the sole from getting in contact with the rock. Other than this, the Roc Icon is probably the best all-round shoe in our test.

**Verdict:** Excellent footwear choice for being able to get to a route and climb it, as well as comfortable enough for going for post-activity refreshment. >



## MILLET TRIDENT GUIDE £120

Trident Guide offers comfort to and from the crag



**F**rench company Millet have been producing equipment for expeditions for over 60 years, and the lessons learnt from these influence their designs to this day. Their Trident Guide is no exception, which in Millet's own words is a 'modern, breathable, fluid and high-traction Alpine approach boot'. Its 3-season design and

features mean that it is well-suited to getting to the foot of major rock routes, as well as being more than suitable for easier climbs and via ferrata. The Trident Guide has an anatomic fit, low-cut split leather upper which is treated with a water-repellent finish. It is also available with a Gore-Tex lining if you feel you need something waterproof. The lacing system that

extends all of the way to the toes allows you to get a close fit, when and where you require it, while the cuff of the shoe is nicely padded, this also helps with comfort levels. A good rubber rand at the front provides protection for the soft suede upper and additional friction when climbing, while a synthetic overlay offers protection towards the back of the shoe.

The heel cup is reinforced and this offers plenty of support on the approaches and during climbing. Underfoot there is plenty of cushioning thanks to an EVA midsole, and again there is the same Vibram sole unit as used on the Scarpa Zodiac, with its in-built climbing zone. The heel of the sole tapers away with the back of the heel of the upper, a feature more common with trainers, and this tends to make the shoe feel bigger in use, and occasionally meant that that you caught the back of the shoe, when trying to step over boulders. The slight amount of lateral twist allowed for smearing on smaller holds, but the thickness of the sole made for a slight lack of feel, which can be problematic when the good handholds start to run out. Overall this is a comfortable and well-made shoe.

**Verdict:** The comfortable choice for simpler scrambles and general approach shoe duties.

## THE NORTH FACE VERTO PLASMA £110

**T**he Verto Plasma is one of the lightest shoes in the test, and as it is billed by The North Face as a hiking shoe giving "cushioned support and protection on load-laden approach routes and scrambles", and it won Best In Test in a previous T&M test, I was keen to see how it compared to pure scrambling-focused footwear tested here. This good-looking shoe has an upper constructed from synthetic microsuede and ballistic nylon leather, which has a tough but flexible feel. When combined with the down-to-the-toe lacing system it produced an excellent fit, yet still managed to feel like you had 'house slipper' levels of comfort. A sturdy two-piece rand runs around the whole shoe, providing protection for the soft upper. There is excellent support for your feet, particularly your heels, which is provided by The North Faces' Cradle technology. This basically is a moulded piece of TPU that is fitted around the rear third of the shoe, that extends slightly into the sole, and also provides some torsional stability. This Cradle was great in use and the difference could really be felt on very stony terrain such as scree approaches and when going downhill.

The Vibram sole that completes the Verto Plasma doesn't have a 'climbing zone' but has two different tread patterns – a fine tread on

High-tech design and materials feature in the Verto Plasma



the inside edge and toe and the outside edge of the heel for fine grip, while there is a broader tread on the rest of it. This tread pattern and the general flexibility of the shoe mean that the Verto Plasma is not as good a scrambling shoe as perhaps it could be. Sure, it can be used for scrambling and simple climbing, but this will come down to your

personal ability and how happy you are on that sort of ground.

**Verdict:** More a 'hiking approach' shoe than a 'climbing approach' shoe, the Verto Plasma is nevertheless an excellent shoe for general approach shoe activities.



## HOW THEY COMPARE

The vital specs for the contenders in our test



Model	Type	Weight	Upper	Sole	More info	Price
1. The North Face Verto Plasma	Shoe	480g	Synthetic/leather	Vibram Masai	<a href="http://www.thenorthface.com">www.thenorthface.com</a>	£110
2. Millet Trident Guide	Shoe	520g	Leather	Vibram	<a href="http://www.millet.fr">www.millet.fr</a>	£120
3. Haglofs Roc Icon	Shoe	540g	Suede/leather	Vibram Ibox	<a href="http://www.haglofs.com">www.haglofs.com</a>	£130
4. Scarpa Zodiac	Shoe	570g	Suede	Vibram Mulaz	<a href="http://www.scarpa.co.uk">www.scarpa.co.uk</a>	£145
5. Hanwag Badile Combi GTX	Boot	620g	Suede/Cordura	Vibram Climbing	<a href="http://www.hanwag.com">www.hanwag.com</a>	£175
6. Scarpa Rebel Lite	Boot	760g	Synthetic	Vibram Mulaz	<a href="http://www.scarpa.co.uk">www.scarpa.co.uk</a>	£240
7. Salewa Rapace GTX	Boot	720g	Nubuck suede/Cordura	Vibram Mulaz	<a href="http://www.salewa.com">www.salewa.com</a>	£170
8. Meindl Alta Via GTX	Boot	1000g	Velour leather	Vibram Multigriff	<a href="http://www.meindl.co.uk">www.meindl.co.uk</a>	£245

Weight based on size 44/single shoe/boot

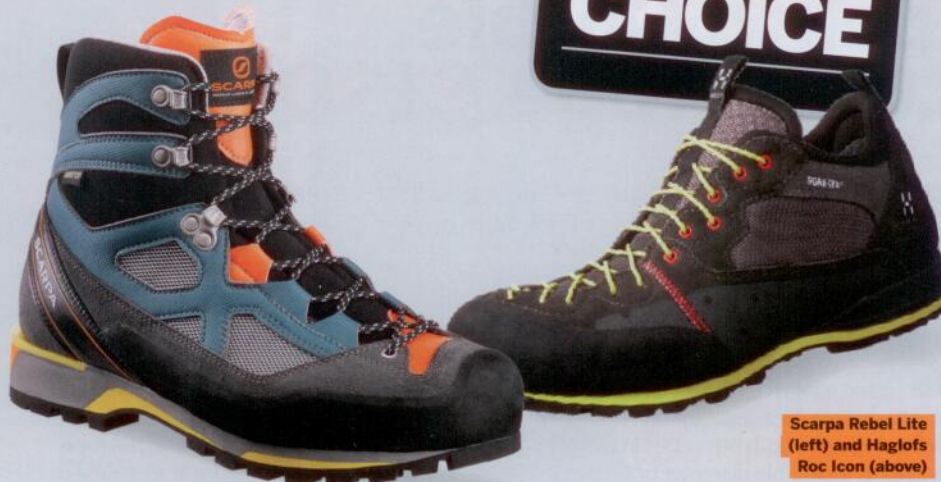
## THE FINAL VERDICT

Summing up the Test Team's overall impressions of the boots on test

If you're looking for an out-and-out lightweight scrambling/climbing boot for in the mountains when the approaches and descents are minimal, then the perfect choice would have to be the **Hanwag Badile Combi GTX**. In the UK, however, the majority of our scrambles involve often significant walk-ins and therefore we need footwear that suits this, so we are giving the Editor's Choice for scrambling boots to the **Scarpa Rebel Lite GTX**.

In the warmer summer months or even to just to wear around your local crag, when a boot is too warm and restrictive (or just look plan silly with shorts!) a shoe can be the more appropriate choice. For pure scrambling then we would go with the **Scarpa Zodiac** for its boot-like qualities while still behaving like a shoe. But just nudging ahead, by the smallest of margins would be the **Haglofs Roc Icon GT** for its additional flexibility and

hence comfort, when not in the mountains. For a comfortable approach shoe that'll cope with easier scrambles the **Millet Trident Guide** is a good choice, while the **Meindl Alta Via** is perhaps the boot equivalent.



Scarpa Rebel Lite (left) and Haglofs Roc Icon (above)