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## Outdoor Retailer Summer Market '10: Footwear makers highlight barefoot running and beefy boots

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Prior to this year's Summer Market, the dedicated footwear section in the Salt Palace was a sort of "dead zone" with little activity. Traffic there increased markedly this summer, reflecting a general surge in energy for the footwear market. With manufacturers moving in a number of directions -- exploring "barefoot" designs, beefing up backpacking lines, investing in trail running, adding lifestyle and cross-over segments -- there was no lack of new products.



### We're barefootin'

The barefoot running trend, fueled in part by the book, "Born to Run," hit full stride at the show, with introductions from several veteran companies as well as newcomers. As SNEWS detailed in the Aug. 4 Morning Report, the barefoot concept has moved beyond running, with **Merrell** launching the Tough Glove (*photo - right*) for casual use ([www.merrell.com](http://www.merrell.com)), and **Vibram** introducing the Komodo Sport (MSRP \$100, *photo - below*) for yoga and other fitness pursuits

([www.vibramfivefingers.com](http://www.vibramfivefingers.com)). ([Click here to read the Morning Report.](#))

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While more barefoot products are emerging, we're also seeing an increase in the number of shoes touted as being "minimalist" or called "natural running." Offering more structure and support than barefoot styles but less than traditional running shoes, minimalist models include the **New Balance** Minimus collection (MSRP \$100, [www.newbalance.com](http://www.newbalance.com)), **GoLite Footwear's** Tara Lite (MSRP \$115, [www.golite-footwear.com](http://www.golite-footwear.com)) and **Saucony's**



Pro Grid Mirage (MSRP \$100, [www.saucony.com](http://www.saucony.com)). But we didn't want for shoes that were nothing but slim protective covers -- nearly slippers. We saw intros from show first-timers from former fashion specialist Terraplana called **Vivobarefoot** (MSRP \$89-\$160, *photo - below*, [www.terraplana.com](http://www.terraplana.com)) and **Kigo Footwear's** Edge and Curv (MSRP \$69, *photo - right*, [www.kigofootwear.com](http://www.kigofootwear.com)).



An interesting twist on the minimalist concept is **Sperry Topsider's** shoes with what it calls SON-R Technology (MSRP \$65-\$90, [www.sperrytopsider.com](http://www.sperrytopsider.com)). Pods on the sole and insole are intended to let the feet feel features on the ground, making it easier to feel your way across difficult terrain. This shoe could be especially helpful when you can't see the ground, such as when portaging a boat.

Opposite of the barefoot and minimalist trend, is the shift to oversized components in footwear to increase stability. One example is **Tecnica's** TRS Inferno Max (MSRP \$150, [www.tecnicausa.com](http://www.tecnicausa.com)), which has a chunky sole to provide a wide, stable platform when moving downhill. Also check out a SNEWS summer 2010 magazine extra about **Hoka One One's** philosophy on chunky footwear by [clicking here](#).

## Beefy boots are back

Speaking of chunky stuff, a surprising number of companies introduced beefy backpacking boots at Summer Market. This might be happening simply because companies have overlooked this category for the past couple of years. But, big boots have also become a fashion trend in Europe, so companies might be anticipating that it will jump the pond.

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We got a look at the new **Vasque** Bitterroot GTX (MSRP \$190, *photo - right*, [www.vasque.com](http://www.vasque.com)), which is modeled after the Wasatch, but includes a burlier outsole. Other new load haulers include **La Sportiva's** Pamir (MSRP \$265, [www.sportiva.com](http://www.sportiva.com)) -- which has a sweet leather lining -- and **Scarpa's** Ladakh GTX (MSRP \$299, [www.scarpa.com](http://www.scarpa.com)), which has 2.4 mm nubuck on the upper, a rubber rand and Vibram sole that make it tough as a tank. For



mountaineering and backpacking, **Wenger** introduced the San Rocco (MSRP \$375, [www.wengerna.com](http://www.wengerna.com)), which is made of extremely durable Anfibio leather.

One boot with great potential is the **Kayland** Vertigo Dual (MSRP \$220, [www.kayland.com](http://www.kayland.com)). Based on the popular Vertigo High, it has all the bells and whistles (Event membrane, high-tech midsole, suede upper, etc.), but it's about \$20 less and is also available in Kayland's Precise Fit to suits folks with lower-volume feet.

## Trail running keeps on truckin'

There's no cohesive trend throughout trail runners -- except a common belief among manufacturers that this remains a lucrative category. Here are three shoes to consider:



**Scarpa** has grown its trail running offering from two SKUs to 12, including the Blitz (MSRP \$105-\$115, [www.scarpa.com](http://www.scarpa.com)), its first shoe with the Boa lacing system.

**Salomon** tried to make the XT Wings a door-to-trail shoe, but that didn't pan out, so it launched the XR Crossmax Guidance (MSRP \$130, *photo - right*, [www.salomon.com](http://www.salomon.com)) to fill that role.

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**Oboz** smartly decreased the weight of the soles in its trail runners, and the men's Lightning (MSRP \$110, [photo - left, www.obozfootwear.com](http://www.obozfootwear.com)) weighs just 12.7 ounces.

## Odds and ends to consider:

>> **The North Face** nailed it with the new Hydroshock water shoe (MSRP \$75, [www.thenorthface.com](http://www.thenorthface.com)), which should be comfy and durable, plus it's super lightweight.

>> We liked a lot of stuff in **Timberland's** Bike Life collection, so it's good to see the Radler (MSRP \$95, [www.timberland.com](http://www.timberland.com)), a multisport shoe with one-way flex in the sole (adding stiffness for pedaling). The shoe has cushioning foam that's also used in mats at Harley Davidson factories. Production line workers can stand on the mats for hours without getting fatigued. Cool, huh?

>> Need to enhance your offering of women's boots? Check out the **Garmont** Amica (MSRP \$130-\$155, [www.garmont.com](http://www.garmont.com)), a hiking shoe made only for women. It has asymmetrical ankle heights, extra room in the metatarsal area and lacing to the toe for precise fit.

>> **Chaco** is expanding its closed-toe offering and targeting younger folks with the good-looking Campus shoe and Woodstock shoe (MSRP \$125, [photo - right, www.chacousa.com](http://www.chacousa.com)). Also, the company's new kids' styles have the potential to be a homerun for retailers.



>> **Lowa's** Camino and Catalan have an upper with flex points (sort of like a bendable straw), so it bends easily, which helps people with high arches, as the tops of their feet tend to bang against boots. [www.lowaboos.com](http://www.lowaboos.com)

>> **Keen** had one of the coolest manufacturing stories at the show, as its new Santiago Lace shoe (MSRP \$50, [www.keenfootwear.com](http://www.keenfootwear.com)) is made with restored machines from the 1950s. For details on the Santiago, as well as other great recycling stories, [click here for the Aug. 6 Morning Report](#).

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>> **Asolo** is making a strong move into the low-cut hiker category with its Escape collection, which includes six models in a wide variety of colors that really pop on the shelf.  
[www.asolo.com](http://www.asolo.com)



>> **Kamik** is very quietly killing it in the rain boot category. Attractive new models include those with a soft shell upper and rubber bottom, so you can wear 'em high, or roll down the soft shell for the slouch look. Plus, there's a fleece liner (*photo - left*) you can insert as a simple way to add warmth to rain boots.  
[www.kamik.com](http://www.kamik.com)  
--*Marcus Woolf*

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**Thanks again for reading and for your support of SNEWS®! We look forward to hearing from you anytime.**

Cheers,

**Michael Hodgson & Therese Iknoian**

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