



Photo: Jeff Greenberg/Alamy

Q Hello Doctor. Tell me, how does using a rustic walking stick compare with walking poles? Are they really worth the cash? **Simon Upton**

A A trekking pole is technically way ahead of a wooden stick. It has a soft, grippy handle, a sharp point, a basket to make sure it doesn't sink too deep in soft ground or snow, and full adjustability, which means it will fit perfectly in the first place and you can then shorten or lengthen it as the terrain dictates. Some also have anti-shock systems, which will ease the pounding on your wrists - and don't forget they pack down small enough to go in your pack when not needed. A stick, on the other hand, is aesthetically pleasing and authentic in feel. The other big difference is in the way they are used. Trekking poles should be used in pairs, where they offer a much bigger benefit than singly. I've never yet seen a walker carrying two wooden poles.



Photo: Tom Bailey

PUT YOUR QUESTION TO THE GEAR DOCTOR!

Email country.walking@lfto.com or post your query on our Facebook page - just search for Country Walking.

SIX OF THE BEST: SANDALS

Ace testers **Tom** and **Steph** celebrate summer by slipping their feet into a selection of top-notch walking sandals.



There are few things in life that feel quite as liberating as ditching your boots, socks or shoes and slipping on a pair of sandals. And for easy walking on warm, dry days, it's possible to knock off quite a few miles in a good pair. Like a good pair of boots, though, you

need to make sure the sandals you choose fit you well. They should hold your foot securely in place and give your toes as much protection as possible. And also like boots, it may take a few short walks to get your feet used to them. Once you get there, though, you'll revel in your new-found freedom - and unlike boots, you can drive home in them afterwards!



Country Walking BEST IN TEST

HI-TEC
Harmony Back Strap £45

► hi-tec.com
Lightweight, stylish sandals for women, with synthetic uppers, soft neoprene lining and a very comfortable sculpted EVA footbed. The sole is stiff and grippy enough to cope with uneven trails, and for more relaxing days you can remove the back strap and simply slip them on. A well-priced and versatile sandal.

BRASHER
Mayan £70
► brasher.co.uk
A traditional-looking leather sandal that's super-comfy, courtesy of well-padded straps and a suede-like memory foam footbed. The front strap is well-placed so holds the toes well behind the bumper, and while it presents an air of comfort and luxury, which is great on a beach, the sole is also stiff and grippy enough to cope with rougher trails.

SOURCE
Gobi £70
► sourcehydration.co.uk
Great-looking and seriously comfortable sandals, with adjustable webbing straps that give a really secure fit and dry quickly too if they do get wet. These feel great to walk in, with grippy rubber on the footbed and stiff soles that cope well with uneven terrain. Covered by Source's Green Dot Warranty - as long as the green dot is intact, the guarantee is valid.



TEVA
Tanza £70
► teva.co.uk
A classy-looking nubuck sandal that really is made for walking decent distances. It has a good, solid midsole, so the odd rock is no problem; and the straps, which are wonderfully comfortable, hold the foot in a perfect position, well back from the bumper. A robust, deep-cleated sole inspires confidence too.

MERRELL
Kahuna III £75
► merrell.com
Rugged-looking sandals with suede uppers and soft Lycra neoprene lining. The stiff Vibram soles feel great on rugged ground, with an air cushion at the heel to absorb impact, and the rugged tread pattern grips well on just about anything. These take longer to dry than a synthetic model, but are superb for walking hot, dry trails.

KEEN
Turia £80
► keenfootwear.com
Not open-toed, but definitely sleek for a hybrid and seriously comfortable too. The midsole is tough enough to tackle rougher paths and the webbing heel-lock system makes them pretty secure too. Toe and heel protection is obviously no problem, but they are pretty enclosed, so if stones get in, they will stay in.