



WALKING GRIPS – AVOID THAT SLIPPERY SLOPE!

Winter Walking Grips: you can't fail to have seen them stacked up on the shelves of your nearest outdoor store. There are a number of different designs on the market, with a range of price tags, and when properly sold and properly used, they do have a place for getting around in winter.

Many of the manufacturers describe their use very accurately:

- 'ideal for icy, low level walking'
- 'security on icy pavements'
- 'Provides flexible and lightweight traction for going to work or the shops'
- 'great for walking the dog on icy forest tracks'

However, there is an increasing and worrying trend of using 'walking grips' in places where they just should not be. The last pair I spotted was on the summit of Cairngorm in sheet ice conditions; another pair was spotted on the Sron na Lairig heading for Braeriach.

All the models currently on the market rely on attachment to the boot via some kind of stretchy rubber/strap system, which on flat ground will remain in place to a certain degree. (I have used them for

dog walking and lost one, as it literally just fell off.) However, as soon as any angle in the ground is experienced by the user (i.e. walking up or down a mountainside) the lateral movement of the boot will mean that the rubber will gradually work itself off, with possible disastrous consequences. Winter walking grips ARE NOT DESIGNED FOR USE ON SCOTTISH WINTER MOUNTAINS.

Most manufacturers do not suggest that they are but, worryingly, I have found reference to products claiming that they would ensure that "you're ready to handle whatever nature hands to you. When you encounter challenging terrain – scree, ice, snow, wet rocks – just take them out and slip them on." Put them on and slip off' might be a more realistic description!

Winter walking grips have their place and that's on flat, low level terrain. If your outdoor adventures take you up into the mountains in winter, please ensure that you have a suitable pair of mountaineering crampons – and, of course, learn how to use them safely.

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Pictures show a selection of winter walking grips. None are suitable for use on Scottish mountains

