5 FULL CIRCLES · HIJRA WALK · WALKER GUIDE

Feet, knees and ankles for the trek

For walkers who want extra support: boots with room up front and a steady ankle, using your own insoles, and a seven-week Knees Over Toes training plan.

1 The trek and your plan

WALKING DAYS	EACH DAY	YOU CARRY	TIME TO PREPARE
Five	**5 to 9 hours**	**A day pack**	**7 weeks**

The ground is sand, gravel, old lava rock and shale. The climb to Ghar Thawr is the steepest part, and there is an easier route for anyone who wants it. Days are warm and nights are cold, near 10 °C (50 °F) and colder at the mountain camp. **Knees feel the downhills more than the uphills,** so this guide puts the weight on the way down.

Part 1 · Gear
Boots that support the ankle, fitting your own insole, and poles.

Part 2 · Training
A seven-week Knees Over Toes plan, seven exercises with demo videos, and trail technique.

Your seven weeks

7 weeks out
Buy the boots. Start the training plan.

Plan weeks 1 to 3
Walk in the new boots until they have about 100 km on them.

Plan weeks 3 to 6
Hills, stairs and a weekly long walk with poles and a day pack.

Final week
Ease off so your legs are fresh.

Trek day
The trek begins, bismillah.

What to get

- [ ] Mid boots with ankle support, tried on with your own insole in, half a size up, wide toe box
- [ ] 5 to 6 pairs of the hiking socks you train in
- [ ] Collapsible poles with cork grips
- [ ] Blister kit: blister plasters, tape, small scissors
- [ ] For training: a wall, a staircase with a rail, a sturdy chair and a couch

2 Boots that hold the ankle

We recommend a **mid-height hiking boot** with room at the front. The collar wraps above the ankle bone, which helps most on loose shale, lava rock and long descents, where a rolled ankle is the biggest risk. All three come in wide and have a stock insole you can swap for your own.



Our first pick

KEEN Targhee IV Mid Waterproof Wide

Men's wide · about $190

The roomiest front of the three, with extra volume for your own insole. A firm heel and padded collar hold the ankle well.



Most ankle support

Oboz Sawtooth X Mid Waterproof

Regular and wide · about $200

The stiffest of the three, with a shank that steadies the foot on rock. The toe box is a little lower, so check the top of the toes.



Lightest to wear

Merrell Moab 3 Mid Waterproof Wide

Men's wide · about $175

Comfortable from day one and easy to break in, with a grippy Vibram sole.

Getting the fit right

- Go **half a size up**; feet swell over long days.
- Shop in the evening, in hiking socks, **with the insole you'll hike with**.
- Leave a **thumb's width** in front of the longest toe.
- Walk down a slope in the store: toes must not touch the front.

Making boots work on the trek

- **Heat:** all three are waterproof and run warm. Wear thin merino socks, change at lunch, and take the boots off at long breaks.
- **Descents:** lace snug over the top of the foot and use the top hooks, so the heel stays back.
- **Break in early:** about 100 km, or three weeks of every training walk.

3 Using your own insole

Replace, don't stack. If your insole or orthotic is full length, take the boot's own insole out and put yours in its place, so it sits directly on the base of the boot.

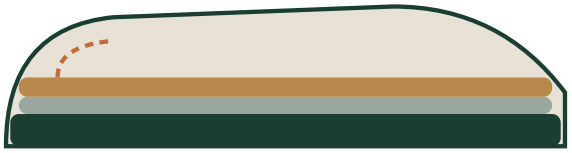
Room for the foot



your insole (gold) on the boot base

Do this: stock insole out, yours in

Less room, heel rides up



your insole stacked on the stock one

Avoid: two insoles stacked

Why stacking causes trouble

- **The heel lifts** out of the heel cup and slips.
- **The toes get crowded** against the top of the boot.
- **Blisters** follow from the slipping and rubbing.

Stacking only works for a thin or three-quarter-length insole in a boot with room to spare.

At the store

1. Bring your insole and trek socks; swap it in before trying the boot.
2. Heel: no lifting on a stair or slope.
3. Toes: a thumb's width in front, nothing pressing on top.
4. The insole lies flat, with no curling or sliding.
5. If it's tight, go wider rather than longer.

4 Poles and grip

Poles take real load off the knees on the way down. Choose cork grips, which stay comfortable in the heat.

- Set the wrist straps so the strap carries your weight.
- Going down, lengthen the poles a little and plant them ahead of you.
- Practice with them before the trip, and pack them in checked luggage.
- Underfoot, a sticky lugged sole does the work: all three boots have one.

▶ Watch: setting your poles for downhill



LEKI Makalu Cork FX TA

Folds to 41 cm

Fits in a suitcase. A Compact size suits shorter walkers.



Black Diamond Trail Cork

About $130 · 65 cm collapsed

Telescoping and sturdy.

5 Your seven-week plan

Built on the Knees Over Toes method. This plan follows Ben Patrick, the "Knees Over Toes Guy," and his ATG Zero routine, which he made for all ages and abilities. It is the same approach he used to get his own mother moving pain-free in her late sixties. Every exercise links to a demo from him or his ATG coaches.

You need no gym. Most days take 30 to 45 minutes. Miss a few days? Don't try to catch up; pick up where you are. A **round** means doing each of the seven exercises once, in order, with a minute's rest between rounds.

A normal week

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
Strength backward walk, then a round	**Walk** with hills or stairs	**Strength** backward walk, then a round	**Rest** or an easy stroll	**Strength** backward walk, then a round	**Long walk** in your boots	**Rest**

Week by week

WEEKS TO GO	STRENGTH DAYS	TUESDAY WALK	SATURDAY LONG WALK
7	1 round	30 min on flat ground	1 hour, flat
6	2 rounds	30 to 40 min with gentle hills	1½ hours
5	2 rounds	Add 5 min of stairs, going down slowly	2 hours, in your new boots
4	2 to 3 rounds	10 min of hills or stairs	2½ hours with day pack and poles
3	3 rounds	15 min of hills or stairs	3 hours on mixed ground
2	3 rounds	15 min of hills or stairs	**Dress rehearsal:** 3 to 4 hours with everything you'll use on the trek
1	1 round, light	Easy 30 min	No long walk. Rest your legs before the flight

Hills and stairs, the right way

Going up

- Take short steps and lean slightly forward.
- Keep a pace where you can still talk.
- Shorten your poles a little.
- No hills nearby? Use a treadmill at a 5 to 8% incline, and stairs for the way down.

Going down

- Go slower than feels necessary, with small steps and soft knees.
- Lengthen your poles and plant them ahead before each step.
- On very steep ground, turn slightly sideways or zigzag.

6 The seven exercises

Keep a rail, wall or chair within reach. Ben's rule: own each position before you push it, and never work through pain.

1 Backward walking — 5 min, build to 10

The gentlest knee strengthener. Start every session with it.

1. Use a hallway, or a treadmill on its slowest speed holding both rails.
2. Walk backward in small steps, landing on the ball of the foot.
3. Stay tall and glance over your shoulder now and then.

Easier: walk beside a counter, one hand on it. **Harder:** backward on a gentle treadmill incline.

▶ Watch the demo

2 Tibialis raise — 15, build to 25

Strengthens the shins. Ben calls it the first line of defense for walking and going downhill.

1. Stand with your back against a wall, feet a step out in front.
2. Keep your legs straight and lift your toes toward your shins.
3. Lower slowly. Wear shoes for heel comfort.

Easier: feet closer to the wall. **Harder:** feet further out.

▶ Watch the demo

3 Calf raise — 15, build to 25

Strong calves and ankles for every climb.

1. Stand facing a wall, hands resting on it.
2. Rise up onto your toes.
3. Lower slowly, counting to 3.

Harder: one foot at a time, or with knees slightly bent.

▶ Watch the demo

4 Patrick step — 10 each leg

The key one for descents. It trains the knee to bend forward over the toes, under control.

1. Stand sideways on the bottom stair, holding the rail.
2. Slowly lower the free heel forward to tap the floor, letting the standing knee travel forward over your toes.
3. Press back up to straight.

Easier: a lower step, such as a thick book, and more help from the rail. **Harder:** a higher step. Go only as far as is pain-free.

▶ Watch the demo

5 Split squat on the stairs — 30 sec each side

Knee and hip strength and flexibility together. This is where Ben's mother started.

1. Face up the stairs holding the rail. Put one foot two or three steps up, the other on the floor behind.
2. Shift forward, letting the front knee go over the toes, until the back hip stretches.
3. Hold, or gently rock in and out.

Easier: a higher step and more rail. **Harder:** a lower step.

▶ Watch the demo

6 Seated good morning — 15

Loosens and strengthens the hamstrings and lower back for carrying a day pack.

1. Sit on the edge of a bench or sturdy chair, legs wide.
2. Keep your back long and lean forward from the hips, reaching toward the floor.
3. Sit back up slowly.

Easier: a smaller lean. **Harder:** hold a light weight at your chest.

▶ Watch the demo

7 Couch stretch — 30 sec each side

Opens hips that tighten over long walking days.

1. Kneel facing away from a couch, one shin resting up the back cushion, the other foot forward.
2. Squeeze your seat and lift your chest.
3. Breathe and hold, then switch.

Easier: pad the knee and keep a hand on a chair. **Harder:** sit taller.

▶ Watch the demo

7 On the trail, and listening to your body

On the trail

- Take shorter steps going down, with soft knees.
- Zigzag across steep ground.
- Use your poles on every descent.
- Rest for a few minutes every hour.
- Tape any hot spot before it becomes a blister.

How to tell it's working

Normal

- Tired or slightly sore muscles for a day or two, especially in the first two weeks.
- Stairs and hills feeling easier by the third or fourth week.

Ease off (skip a day, or drop to one round)

- Sharp pain in a joint, or any swelling.
- Pain that is still there the next morning.
- If it doesn't settle within a few days, check with your doctor.

> **Listen to your body.** Check this plan with your own doctor, especially with any knee or foot history. Stop any exercise that causes sharp pain.

8 Watch how it's done

Point your phone's camera at a code to open the video, or tap the title in this PDF. The whole plan, with every video playing on the page, is also at 5fullcircles.com/training.

1
Backward walking
Ben Patrick, ATG Zero routine (0:38)

2
Tibialis raise
Ben Patrick, ATG Zero routine (14:51)

3
Calf raise
ATG Exercise Coaching

4
Patrick step
ATG Exercise Coaching, with support

5
Split squat on the stairs
Ben Patrick's mother (1:56)

6
Seated good morning
ATG Exercise Coaching, training at 75

7
Couch stretch
ATG Exercise Coaching

ALL
The whole routine
Ben Patrick, ATG Zero: My Fitness Formula For Life (19 min)

STORY
His mother's story
My Mom's Experience With Knees Over Toes (5 min)

POLES
Using poles downhill
Women's Fitness Adventures