

Reconstructing the UlaanBaatar Boot

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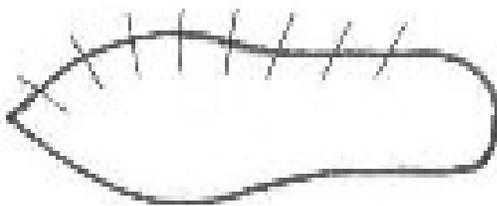
Several years ago, a friend and I stumbled across these boots in a military antiques shop in Seattle (now closed). We recognized them as traditional Mongolian footwear and were informed by the shopkeeper that they are still manufactured in UlaanBaatar for the military.

When the stitching wore through the soles, I tore the boots apart to refurbish them. This article outlines the process for putting them back together again. I highly recommend that you cut your pattern out of tag board or lightweight cardboard and tape the pieces together to make sure that they will assemble correctly, before cutting in to your leather. Also please note that these drawings are not to scale ...

Boot pattern and materials

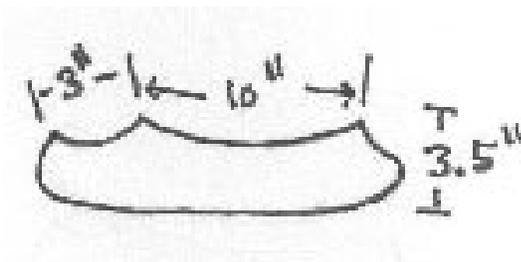
Note: These drawings are not to scale!

To draft a pattern for the sole:



Trace around your foot on a piece of sturdy paper. Add about 3" to the toe, and about 1 1/2" at the heel as shown below. Add at least 1/2" around all edges of the pattern. Your boot should be large enough to accommodate 1/2" layer of socks. (The pattern for the felt sock that is traditionally worn with this boot is at the end of this article.) You will need 4 sole pieces.

To draft the lower boot (or foot section):



Draft a pattern as shown at left. The measurements and curves should match your calf and sole pieces. Remember to add seam allowances. The 3" curve at front is what brings the boot into an upward curl at the toe. You will need 4 lower boot sections.

To draft a pattern for the upper boot (calf section):

Measure around your calf and add 3 - 4", then divide in half. For instance, my calf measures 14" around, I add 3" and divide by 2, which gives me an upper boot pattern that is 10" across at the top, narrowing to 9" at the bottom.

This upper boot section should extend from the top of your foot to the bottom of your kneecap. You will need 4 upper boot sections.



To determine the amount of leather you need, lay out your pattern pieces and measure the square footage.

In addition to the leather for the pieces you have just drafted, you will need:

- Heavy sole or yak leather
- Stamped or patterned shoe weight leather
- Glove weight leather strips for piping, appliqué and top facing (optional but recommended)
- Fabric scraps for the back layers of the leather appliqué (optional)
- Single fold bias tape
- Thick felt for insoles
- Cotton or linen to cover the insoles
- Sinew for stitching the boots together
- Composite soles (optional but highly recommended, especially if you are walking on pavement)

Assemble the soles

Cut 2 soles of yak or sole leather. These will be your outer soles.

Cut 2 soles of stamped or thin, sturdy leather. These will be your inner soles.

The appearance of a stacked leather sole is accomplished by stacking 9 layers of single fold cotton bias seam binding (white or tan) around the outer edge of the inner sole. I replaced the bottom layer of seam binding with single fold suede leather and stitched it down. I stitched each layer of seam binding down separately over the leather, rather than trying to stitch through all 8 layers at once. The top 2 layers are turquoise leather, the same type that is used as piping throughout the rest of the boot. Seam binding and soft leathers are used because they shrink tight when they get wet, making a weather-resistant seam.

The pattern for the insole pad may need to be cut down so that it fits inside of the stacked seam binding. Cut 2 insoles from 1/4" felt. Cut 2 insole covers out of cotton or linen, allowing 1/2" seam allowance. Turn the seam allowance over the edge of the felt and baste the edges to the underside of the insole. Place the covered insole on the inner sole; it should sit a little lower than the stacked bindings. Using sinew, whip stitch the insole to the inner sole so that it stays in place. The whip stitch pattern is indicated in the first drawing at the top of this article.

Assemble the upper boot

Cut the foot and calf pieces out of stamped shoe weight leather. If you want to embellish your boots, appliqué these pieces now, using your glove leather and fabric pieces. The photo at the head of this article shows appliqué at the top of the boot, an orange stripe, and another piece of appliqué above that. The orange stripe is the top of the boot, the appliqué above it belongs to a separate sock. The orange stripe is a facing that is applied to the boot to finish the top edge. The appliqués at the heel and toe help to stiffen and reinforce those areas. The edges of the appliqué extend to the edge of the leather piece, and are stitched in to the seams, again as a method of reinforcement. The photo shows turquoise leather used as the background for the appliqués; my boots have red and yellow fabric incorporated as backgrounds in addition to the turquoise leather. I have also seen brocades used as background color for these appliqués.

Match the bottom of the calf section to the top of the foot section. Insert 3 layers of single fold (turquoise) leather between the foot and calf pieces, as piping, matching all raw edges. Stitch these sections together using 1/4" seam allowance. Stitch each foot / calf section together at the front and back, again using 3 layers of single fold (turquoise) leather as piping.

The orange leather (as shown in the photograph) is the same weight as the appliqué leather. Place the right side of the leather on the inside of the boot and stitch it across the top. Fold this leather to the outside and stitch it down on the front of the boot. This is a typical Chinese textile facing and covers the raw edge of the top of the boot.

Cut out 2 small pear-shaped pieces of stamped leather. Stitch the top of the pear to the back seam of the calf section, inside the boot, to cover the intersecting seams. This piece of leather hangs over the seams and protects your sock from wearing through at the heel. It will conform to your foot and should not need to be stitched down anywhere else.

Bringing sole to your boot

Sew the inner sole to the foot of the boot, starting at a side. DO NOT start at the ankle or the toe if you are doing this by hand.

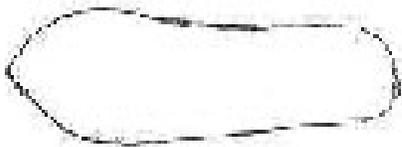
The outer sole on the original boot was sewn on at the same time as the inner sole. The original outer sole was sliced diagonally along the running stitches, to conceal and protect those stitches. As the outer sole wore away, the stitches became exposed and broke, which caused the entire sole to come away from the boot. After attempting to sew through the outer sole, inner sole and multiple layers of bindings, I gave up and glued the outer sole on. Regardless of whether you stitch or glue your outer sole on, I heartily recommend that you glue an additional outer sole, preferably of a composite material, to the bottom of the outer sole. The Ulan Baator boot is designed for walking on grass and tundra, rather than the concrete and gravel that many of us are subject to. A composite sole (rubber or other man-made material) will help to protect your handiwork and will preserve the life of your boot.

The only problem I have encountered in putting these boots together is that the toe tends to splay. My boots originally had a single stitch at the toe which prevented the layers from separating. It is very difficult to do by hand.

Sock pattern and materials

The sock works best if it is made of 1/4" or 1/2" thick felt. If you are not a felt maker, quilt several pieces of wool felt or woven wool together. Do not use Poly Craft Felt, as it will shred after only a few wearings. My husband's boots had a quilted cotton sock which does not work as well because it falls down inside the boot. I sewed ribbons to the top edges of his socks, just below the appliqué band at the top, which tied to the top of the boot, which kept them in place when he wore them. Your socks will work best if they are sturdy enough to stand by themselves in order to support the appliqué at the top, and to stay in place inside the boot.

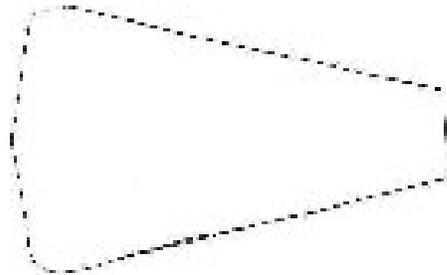
To draft the sole of the sock:



Trace around your foot and add 1" at the heel, and 2" at the toe. The seam allowances on the original sock are 1/4", I suspect that they used 1/2" and then trimmed the seams down. The sock still has a pointed toe but it is not as severe of a point as the boot. Cut 2 soles.

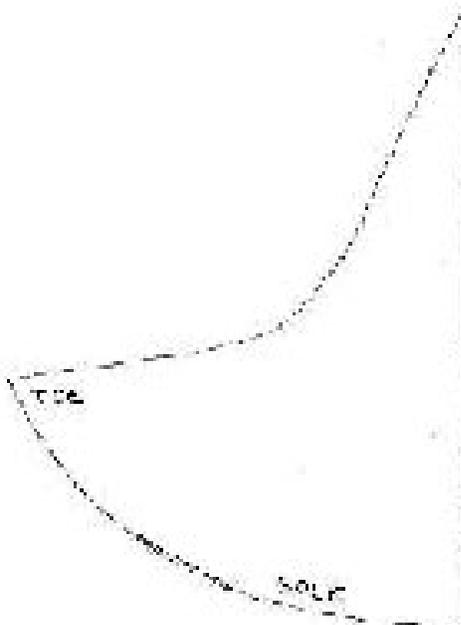
To draft the upper sock:

Measure around your calf and add 1 - 2". Standing on the floor, measure from the floor to the center of your knee to determine the height of your sock. The upper sock attaches directly to the sole, so there is no "foot" piece as there is in the boot. Cut 2 calf sections, with the front straight edge on the fold of your material.



The heel section of my sock (shown above at right) measures 5 1/2" tall, 1" at the top and about 3 1/2" at the bottom. Cut 2 pieces, one for each sock.

The toe section (shown below) measures 7" tall by 5 1/2" at its widest point. Cut 4 pieces. Sew 2 pieces together along the top curve.



Assemble the sock

The band at the top of the calf section pattern can be appliquéd. This band of appliquéd is about 4" tall and is executed in glove leather. The top edge is faced with bias cut corduroy. The bottom edge of the appliquéd work is finished with a piece of fabric or leather piping. Do the appliquéd work before assembling the rest of the sock.

Both the heel and toe are sewn into the calf as gussets, again allowing for 1/2" seam allowances. Slit the front fold to accommodate the toe gusset. Sew the heel gusset onto the back of the calf section. Sew the back of the sock about halfway up the back, leaving the top several inches unsewn, or open. On my sock these open edges are whip stitched, and there is no other decorative treatment, facing or finishing.

Trim all seams to 1/4". You will want to reinforce the heel with denim or other firmly woven cloth, as rubbing against the seams of the boot will make your sock very prone to wear.

Photos of my original boots are on Pinterest at the following link:

www.pinterest.com/AugustPhoenix2/refurbishing-an-ulan-baatar-boot/

Lastly, I include a very helpful tip from one of my readers, **Michael B** – who left this comment on my page after watching some Mongolian bootmakers on YouTube:

When stitching the uppers to the sole, if the toe splays & there's very little room to handle needle/etc - try making a few stitches without pulling them tight. Leaving 2-3 inches of loose thread between stitches lets the sole 'float' away from the upper & gives your hands more room to work.

After a lot of stitches have been loosely made, then you can tighten each stitch individually by yanking on the thread & tightly pulling sole to upper.

Who would'a thought! ;-)