

A SHORT WALK THROUGH SHOE HISTORY

Shoes aren't just what we wear to keep sharp objects out of our feet. They are history's favourite experiment in style, science, and sometimes silliness. From status symbols and space tech to playground light shows, every era has left its footprint on how we walk the world.

1 10,200–9,300 YEARS AGO World's oldest directly dated shoes Woven sagebrush-bark "Fort Rock-style" sandals (Oregon, USA). Distinct toe-loop pattern; radiocarbon dated.

2 1ST–3RD CE — ROMAN CALIGAE Heavy duty hobnailed soldier sandals; the original puncture-resistant workwear.

3 14TH–16TH CE — ARMORED SABATONS Articulated metal foot armor for knights; think steel toe... and steel everything.

4 1830 — FIRST COMMERCIAL RUBBER-SOLED "SAND SHOES" Liverpool Rubber Company makes canvas shoes with rubber soles (a.k.a. plimsolls). Goodyear's 1839 vulcanised rubber makes it practical. The first rubber-soled shoe is generally attributed to John Boyd Dunlop and his Liverpool Rubber Company around 1830. Dunlop invented a method to attach a canvas upper to a rubber sole, creating the "sand shoe" for beachgoers. These early shoes evolved into the first "sneakers," which, despite the name, were not originally associated with sports.

5 1892–1916 — SNEAKERS SCALE UP U.S. Rubber starts selling "sneakers" (1892). Keds brand consolidates rubber-soled casual shoes (1916).

6 1908/1917 — CONVERSE & THE ALL STAR Converse Rubber Shoe Co. (1908); All Star basketball shoe lands in 1917 and becomes the court icon.

7 1914 — FAUX LEATHER Material invented 1914, mass footwear use follows later. Naugahide (1914) is an early synthetic leather; faux-leather shoes become common once PVC/PU coatings mature mid-century.

8 1937 — VIBRAM'S LUGGED "CARRAMATO" SOLE Vitale Bramani invents the first rubber lug sole for mountaineering; later seen on K2 boots (1954).

9 1966 — MEMORY FOAM (WHAT IT IS) NASA engineers create viscoelastic polyurethane foam ("memory foam") to improve crash protection and seating; later ends up in insoles for pressure dispersion.

10 1979 — FIRST NIKE AIR SHOE Nike Tailwind releases with encapsulated air cushioning.

11 1989 — REEBOK PUMP Inflatable chambers you squeeze to custom-fit the shoe. Controlled by a button, this inflatable air bladder technology created a sensation in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Basketball kids everywhere: "Pump it up."

12 2005 — VIBRAM FIVEFINGERS Toe-sleeve "barefoot" shoes promise foot strength + ground feel.

13 1992 — LED LIGHT-UP KIDS' SHOES L.A. Gear's LA Lights go big in '92; a whole playground lights up.

14 2011 / 2016 — BACK TO THE FUTURE REAL POWER LACES Nike MAG releases in 2011 (non-self-lacing charity shoe). In 2016, a limited MAG with "power laces" arrives, and the consumer HyperAdapt 1.0 debuts self-lacing tech.

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