

Dry Boots a Sportsman's Best Friend

By Andrew Smith

In freezing weather there's almost nothing more important to an avid outdoorsman, like myself, than a pair of warm, dry boots.

But after years of tramping through ice and snow, not to mention falling into creeks, I've come to believe the only sure way to keep my boots warm and dry is to leave them back where it *is* warm and dry—at home. Unfortunately, I haven't figured out a way to leave my feet at home with them and still go anywhere worth going.

I've tried it all. I've smeared, sprayed and spread more grease, beeswax and silicon potions on more boots than I care to remember. As a result, my fingertips are permanently waterproofed, but my boots still leak. Nevertheless, every winter I zealously apply more goo to the same old cracked leather in the hopes that it will somehow keep the water and the cold out.

But it doesn't. It keeps the *air* out, so at the end of the day my toes smell like weasel bait, and small carnivores attack my feet on the way back to the truck. And it makes moss and twigs stick to my boots so that my feet look like they were swallowed by a giant Venus fly trap, and my wife won't let me come inside until I take them off. And it lets me leave sticky, waterproof footprints wherever I walk, like a really big garden slug. But it doesn't keep the cold and wet out of my boots. And by nightfall my feet feel like a couple boxes of frozen squid.

That's why there's electric socks. Electric socks are what happens when a guy that should be designing computer circuits doesn't finish the third grade. He spends the rest of his life “electrifying” things, like forks, socks and toothbrushes, for the good of mankind. About the only thing worse than getting a pair of electric socks for Christmas is getting a pair that are the right size, so you actually have to put them on. It's like having a woodstove in your boot. You can imagine what weasel bait smells like after it's been heated for a few hours in an electric sock.

I'd like to find the guy who invented electric socks and make him wear the things for a while—after I hooked them up to a car battery. He'd have some toasty feet. I have two pairs of electric socks. I wouldn't wear them if Hell did freeze over.

I've tried rubber boots. Rubber boots are indeed waterproof, at least until you take them close to some water. Then they get holes in them. I don't know how that happens, but I have umpteen pairs of rubber boots and they all have holes in them. Makes me wonder why I don't have 46 kids too.

And I'm not just talking about a little pinhole that might save bacteria from freezing to death, or let an ice molecule cling to my sock. I mean, when I punch a hole in my boot, why the whole wide world can have truck with my foot whenever it pleases. I don't mean a few snowflakes can brush my toes. I mean a whole arctic front *with* an inversion can move right in. I mean walrus could live there.

I've actually pulled off a cold, wet boot and found tundra growing inside it. And when I tipped it up to empty it out ice floes and baby harp seals fell out instead of water! And that was just a fair-sized hole. I'm thinking of selling oil leases for some of the big ones.

Oh, I know; you're thinking, "Well, why don't you just patch the hole?" The answer is, I've tried that. I've patched boots with band-aids, hot wax, plywood, duct tape, staples, needle and thread, bubble gum and even specially made waterproof boot patches. And none of them worked.

The boot patches were the worst, because as soon as I stuck one on there everyone could see that I had a hole in my boot. And as soon as I went outside I knew I did too, but I couldn't see it anymore, because it had a patch over it. Then I got into this weird geometrical progression thing, because it took two patches to cover the original one, and the boot still leaked. So it took four to cover the two, and sixteen to cover the four, and on and on until my boot looked like it was shingled in sliced bologna by a crazed French chef. And it still leaked. Because, unlike even the most expensive pair of boots, leaks always come with an *unlimited* warranty.

So, I reckon I'll have cold feet again this winter, barring global warming, or some rare kind of Botswanian toe fever. I guess that's just the price I've got to pay to enjoy the lovely Black Hills during the season of ice and snow. And things aren't that bad, really, because I'll always have one pair of warm, dry boots. The ones in my closet.