

Exact same shot but with more mud covering boots to come. Fishing rod (or other fishing prop) in the background instead of shed antler.



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# Booters, Soakers and the Hotfoot

## Keeping dry is not always an option

**I**f you spend any time outdoors, you've likely experienced a booter. Some people call them soakers, the managing editor of this esteemed magazine has coined the experience the hotfoot. Whatever you call it, it adds up to the same thing: wet feet.

Avoiding a booter is pretty much a full-time job when you're in the bush. While all outdoor activities hold the possibility of stepping in water that'll

go over your boots, moose hunting has to be the worst. You simply can't avoid water holes and wetlands when you're chasing swamp donkeys. Even if you find your way into a big cutover, the odds are there's an old swamp lurking somewhere, and you're going to find it the hard way.

### Finders, Keepers

A couple of seasons back, my oldest

son, Devin, joined our moose-hunting gang for a bow hunt. He'd been hunting for a while but didn't have many moose outings under his belt. So, my buddy Richard took him into one of our favourite swamps for a cow-calling session. The swamp in question is a classic moose zone. It has high grass with a small creek that meanders into a frog pond, framed by a thick spruce forest and the remnants of an old bea-

ver dam. Moose eat, drink, sleep, and make out here. But walking through this swamp is like walking through a field of land mines. These little sink holes are cleverly disguised by tall, golden grass which makes it all very pastoral, so you think you're doing well, and then...splosh. The "it," in this case, is a step that will cause your boots to disappear into 2 feet of black primordial ooze.

Devin did his best to conquer the swamp, and apparently made out pretty well until he was just about at his stand. Then, the inevitable happened. His high-priced hunting boot disappeared into a muskeg hole that apparently smelled not unlike rotten-egg gas. He went nearly to his knee.

"My foot is totally soaked," he said over the radio. "Nice."

"Welcome to moose hunting," I offered, helpfully.

On the way back to camp, Devin soaked the other foot as well. Even the most expen-

sive Gore-Tex boots are not much help if the water is running over the tops of them.

## A Part of Life

As kids, my brother and I often went brook trout fishing in local creeks. Booters were so much a part of our outdoor life that we simply embraced having wet feet. We'd walk for hours in soaking-wet sneakers with no socks. Our childhood feet seemed to manage pretty well, save for the occasional leech and blister. These days, I'd be a lot less happy about any of those possibilities. A day in the bush with wet feet is rarely as much fun as a day with dry ones. There's something about adulthood that brings on a near fanatical need to have dry feet.

One dry-foot option that works pretty well is a pair of Gore-Tex socks. A friend turned me on to them a few years ago and they did improve the wet-foot situation. They are, however, rather expensive, and I find them a bit hard to justify. They also tend to hold onto foul-foot smells like nobody's business. Dry feet, but gag-inducing smells; it's a rather unfortunate trade off.

Having a high pair of rubber boots is a real advantage when it comes to avoiding the booter. At one time, you didn't have a lot of choice in this department. You were stuck with old-school mid-calf black rubber boots that offered no grip, or heavy, insulated winter boots good to -40°C, but also not typically tall. Neither choice was that great in most typical-hunting situations.

These days, just about every hunting footwear company produces high rubber boots in some shape or form. I own a couple of pairs, both with impressive camouflage designs on the rubber outer. One set is light and good for long-distance walking. The other set is heavier, with a thick, aggressive sole. The downside of the all-rubber hunting boot is that it doesn't breathe,

so you can get a semi-wet foot from your own sweat. However, for me it's a minor issue compared to having ice-cold mus-

keg juice pouring into calf-high leather boots. To each their own.

## Almost the Wiser

While this columnist has become a bit more "hotfoot" wise as the years have gone by, I'm still a fairly regular customer. A few days after Devin's experience in the swamp, I was back in the same spot with Richard. On my first pass, I got through the high grass swamp without stepping into a single sink hole. Feeling self-satisfied, I sat smugly in the stand with warm, dry feet as my partner called like a love-lorn cow. After an hour, it was decided the moose were not hearing us, so up we got. We had to go back through the same swamp, which shouldn't have been a problem. This time, however, I barely made it 15 metres. My boot completely disappeared into a mucky swamp hole cleverly hidden in the grass. I face-planted my crossbow-carrying, camouflage-clad body into the swamp.

And my right foot was soaked.

If you play in the bush, there's simply no escape from the booter. ●

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