



ROCK TREADS

Big Disc Traction Kit 2.0

REVIEW
by Brian Clark

My initiation to the mystical world of steelheading came one blistering and smoky summer week in the early 1990s on the fabled North Umpqua River. I'd borrowed a sweet Scott Heliply 888-3 for the trip and scored some intel and flies from one of my fly fishing heroes, Randall Kaufmann at Kaufmann's Streamborn in Tigard, near Portland. I picked up a few more flies at the Steamboat Inn, then pitched my tent at Horseshoe Bend. I had a case of ramen noodles, a dozen cans of French-cut green beans, respectable chest waders and wading boots with felt soles, a sturdy wading staff, and a ratty, coffee-stained copy of an old Zane Grey book. I was ready to put in my 10,000 casts and lay siege to the river for as long as it took.

It didn't go well. Despite being a strong, athletic youngster who'd done some reasonably serious wading, I'd wildly underestimated how slippery the riverbed would be. I spent the entire week sliding and stumbling across the riparian equivalents of greased bowling balls and waxed floors. Those flat, algae-covered basalt shelves sloping down into the torrent were the scariest thing I'd ever encountered in a river, and they haunted my dreams. I ditched my waders after taking two unscheduled swims on the first day; even with a good wading belt cinched down tight, it seemed that I'd probably end up soaked whether I wore them or not, and it was far safer without. Man, that water was cold, especially during those wicked early morning wades.

Those old school felt soles have since fallen out of favor in many corners of the community and been outlawed in a few jurisdictions, thanks to their role in the proliferation of various invasive aquatic pests. Although newer rubber composites are stickier than older versions, and modern felt is also more eco-friendly than previous iterations, neither are a match for smooth rocks covered in slippery snot.

Fortunately, along the way somebody figured out how to apply the idea of studded snow tires to the soles of wading boots. Unfortunately, studs have numerous drawbacks. Not only do they wear out and occasionally fall out, they don't work well in some rivers, and they're decidedly unfriendly to many non-aquatic surfaces – hardwood floors and inflatable boats come to mind.

Enter aluminium bars and cleats, finally perfected by Rock Treads. If you've ever attempted to portage an aluminum (yes, we're flexible on the spelling here at OTFM) boat across rocky terrain, you already understand the underlying principle: Al is downright sticky on rocks. That's because it's softer than the rocks themselves (unlike steel studs) but harder than the moss, slime, or algae; they cut through the goop and stick to the rock. Unlike felt, aluminum also performs well on snowy trails.

Rock Treads mills their cleats from aircraft aluminium, which lasts longer than cast or poured aluminum. They're lightweight yet extremely durable, and because they're rounded, they won't poke holes in rafts. Over the past year I've been wearing them regularly on steep, slippery-when-wet concrete slopes during my urban carping adventures, and on summer wet wading trips to the Rockies. I avoid wearing them indoors, but their performance on a variety of wet and dry outdoor surfaces has been excellent.

Rock Treads can be retrofitted onto any wading shoe or boot sole, felt or rubber. It takes a little work, but it's neither complex nor difficult. I knocked out the installation on the pair of wading shoes pictured in about a half-hour, and it was a fun little project. Rock Treads also offers an installation option for \$35; send your boots to them, they'll do the install and send them right back.

Given the many unsavory potential outcomes of a backcountry fall – broken bones, broken rods, bruises and gashes, wounded pride, and possible drowning – paying a little for more traction seems like a bargain.

MSRP US\$54.95

The Big Disc Traction Kit 2.0 contains 10 discs and all necessary mounting hardware, including a drill bit and an array of different sized bolts to fit any shoe or boot.

www.rocktreads.com



Note that Rock Treads and iFlyFishMontana are collaborating to produce a humor series on Instagram and YouTube called "Between Two Rods" (@betweentworods).

So far they've interviewed Kelly Galloup and Hilary Hutcheson, and there are more to come!