

GRUNDÉNS ROCK ARMOR WADING BOOTS | Review by Brian Clark

Wading skills are slippery things. If you don't practice them, they perish. If you attempt to wade deep and fast without practicing, *you* might perish. And let's face it: getting old really sucks. Although I'm certain that a more realistic sense of my own mortality is mostly worthwhile, it sure takes the fun out of wading big rivers. Between knowing that I can no longer walk on whitewater like I did in my 20s and an altogether too real grasp of the impact injuries could have on my quality of life, my anticipation of a recent trip to the notoriously treacherous rivers of coastal Oregon came laced with some trepidation.

I'm haunted by fond memories of terrifying wades in the PNW back in the 90s, before I'd discovered the virtues of felt soles and studs. In recent years, I've largely turned my back on felt; a great deal of ink has already been spilled on that controversy — do some Googling if you'd like to learn more. I'm choosing to trust the science and steering clear. I'm

also not fond of studs; not only are they loud in rivers and sketchy on dry rocks, they aren't kind to inflatable boats or indoor flooring. For all of those reasons, my old boots clearly weren't going to cut it for this next trip.

Fortunately, a few of us from the OTFM fold made a run to the Denver Fly Fishing Show this year where Grundéns introduced their new Rock Armor line of wading boots. I was able to wrangle an early shipment just in time for my Oregon steelheading adventures. Before leaving, I carefully installed the Hexagrip™ alloy cleats, seating each into the hex-shaped patterns molded into the Vibram™ wading outsoles using both the screws provided and a generous dose of Gorilla Glue. The “Stud Pack” also includes screw-in carbide studs, but I decided not to install them before

seeing whether the rubber + aluminum system would provide adequate traction — although I did bring the studs along, just in case.

I'm pleased to report that the combination of the cleats and rubber did just fine. It isn't quite the same as felt, but it's solid. By the second day I'd lost two cleats (out of 20), but the rest survived the whole week of hard wading; that's pretty much what I'd expected, and I definitely recommend both gluing and screwing down the cleats.

The Grundéns designers have done a particularly great job with composition of the rubber (very sticky) and the design of the molded outsole: the depth of the cleat receptacles is just right to enable them to bite the slippery rocks when the rubber compresses, but such that they don't protrude. I wouldn't shuffle dance on my hardwood floors in them, but I never felt like my cleats presented any danger to the raft. I also find alloy cleats to be much safer out of the water than carbide studs, although the combination of sticky rubber with cleats and the studs would probably work quite well.

At first the hexagonal grid on the sides of the boots perplexed me somewhat, and I was concerned that it would pick up debris. That turned out to be a non-issue, and I found the protection and padding to be just right. They ran true-to-size, laced up tight, drained well, dried fast, gave excellent ankle and arch support, and kept me (mostly) upright both in the water and out. I'm impressed with the boots — and also quite relieved that I didn't die. They look pretty dang cool as well — after all, as every fan of CGP Grey knows, [hexagons are the bestagons!](#)

MSRP US\$329

Website: www.grundens.com

GRUNDÉNS

