



In Bounds

by Jack MacKenzie, CGCS

Alluring eyes watched me closely, two red and

puffy combs meant to entice even the most discerning of hens. Step by step, around my campsite, he pursued me stealthily with intimate dreams, mistaking my form for a female spruce grouse. This was one of several unexpected events I encountered upon my five day spring solo trip into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area.

My first day and ten miles in, I also encountered another surprise, one that changed my adventure dramatically. Ice, and lots of it, barred my way for the second leg of a 45-mile journey. After much thought, I had to create a plan “B” if I were to continue my adventure into the wilderness.

Stymied by a frozen sheet on the east shore, I was limited to backtracking my steps and creating a new game plan. This move had to be made rapidly, for I feared a shift

in the wind would ice-lock me to my campsite with a horny grouse for the rest of my experience.

Isn't this truly the way of the turf manager as well as the wilderness adventurer? Even the best-laid plans can be altered quite quickly by weather, staffing challenges and even the notorious “surprise” change of a tee time tournament to a last minute shotgun. But as pliable administrators, you plug away always trying to provide the best playing conditions possible taking into account weather thrusts, economic lunges and scheduling parries.

In my early years as a superintendent, I often became frustrated with all of the unanticipated events that messed up my neat and tidy scheduling. Surely my staff thought I was crazy to torture the NOAA ‘weather radio’ in a bench vice when Thor ravaged the trees on the course. Or my never acted upon threats to flatten all the tires in the cart shed to give the pro shop boys a taste of a real

“scramble”. Of course the later would only come back to haunt me as they likely didn’t know how to fill the tires and to what pressure.

It took a few years, but I soon realized that agronomists, and in particular, golf course managers, are plagued by many challenges beyond their control. I could not control somebody else’s actions any more than I could stop a three-inch rain event during the state two-man event. Realizing and acknowledging my impotency in these matters was actually quite empowering. With patience, I learned that rather than wrestle with the “what ifs” and “shoulda, couldas”, I only needed to take a deep breath and implement a plan “B”.

You could say that my up-north reprieve was moist, no, it actually was quite wet, and cold too. Very little precipitation fell (just a nuisance snow), but the lakes were high and streams overflowing, often atop of and down the portages. Enter another life lesson learned at a golf course. Dry and warm feet are hard to beat.

For my birthday I received

from my understanding bride a pair of Chota Hippies and Portage Trekker boots. Supportive, warm and completely dry, these protective coverings allowed me to step from my canoe up to my high thighs into frigid water, wade through portages normally above the river level, and my toes toasty warm the whole time. Amazing technology that really made the trip comfortable.

As a turf manger, perhaps like you, I was constantly plagued with damp feet caused by morning dew, broken irrigation heads, malfunctioning water coolers and pond fountain corrections often placed my feet in wet and uncomfortable situations. In the winter time it was perspiration soaked Sorrell boots that seemed to get cold quickly and made it feel like my feet were encased in ice cubes.

My first remedy was a series of footwear to be exchanged through the day as conditions changed. Low cut muck shoes to sneakers and then onto boots or sandals depending upon my task of the day. Typically, if I remembered to place the wet shoes

in the sun, I could begin the process over the following day and maintain dry feet once again. However, the hottest ticket for foot bliss came with the investment of a Peet Shoe Dryer.

This incredible device, <http://www.peetdryer.com/>, became an indispensable tool in my extremity management toolbox. Gloves, sox, hats, shoes and of most importance, boots were dried overnight to provide a bit of luxury to my often wet days. Perhaps you should consider one or even several to share at your shop.

My choice for propulsion in a solo canoe is double blading. During the third day of my travels, following 25 miles of wet and then dry hands, my thumbs developed serious skin cracking adjacent to the nails. This very painful condition reminded me of cup cutting, and the wear and tear I used to place upon my whole hand.

The soil tended to dry skin out and when combined with wet followed by dry conditions, my digits were often lined with deep and agonizing fissures. The persistent seasonal condition, as well as the continuously dirty hands, required me to wear thin, rubber palmed, gloves

made from bamboo fiber. The dirt never impacted my skin and thus the damage was limited. When I did develop a cut or sore, I would slather my hands with three-in-one antibiotic ointment prior to donning my gloves. The recovery was incredibly fast.

With limited means, I performed the same task in the wilderness. My trusty first aid kit contained all of the tools I needed to clean, anoint and protect my thumbs and after a few hours I was rewarded with comforting relief.

Why solo tripping you ask? I suppose it is all about the freedom and often-personal challenges to do what I want or need to do with no external resources. The accomplishment of which brings its own rewards. Soloing also affords me a time for reflection. No noise pollution, emails, phone calls, meetings or obligations beyond what I need interrupts my thoughts and prevent me from contemplation... or wondering how my pesky spruce grouse could possibly mistake me for a potential mate.