

MY SEVEN-LEAGUE BOOTS

By
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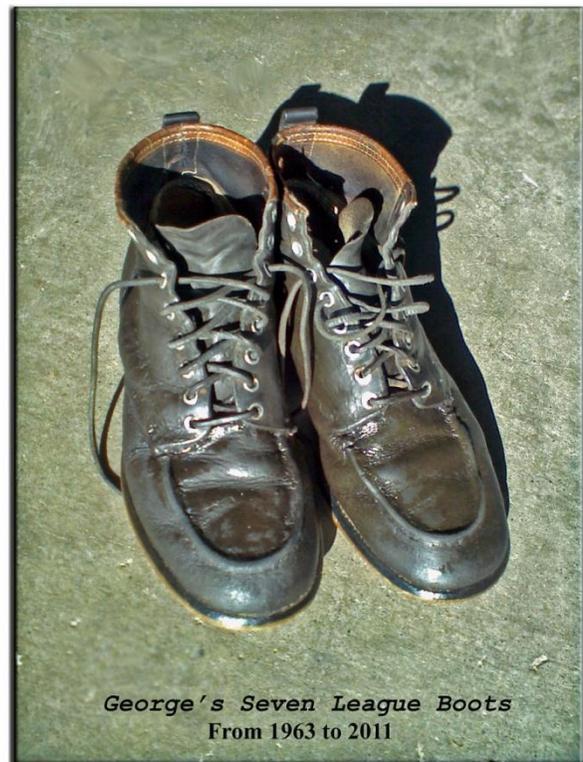
This story began when I was part of a Bell of Nevada team assigned to select a new AT&T Microwave-Radio Route across Nevada. The route was to parallel the existing route across northern Nevada but would span the central part of the state. Nevada Bell engineers would be given the responsibility for route and site selection, subject to AT&T Company's approval, and the plant department would provide one member to the selection team. It was my good fortune to be assigned to that plant position, even though it would take me away from my regular management job for several weeks.

The search for radio-relay sites would require a lot of driving and hiking in mountaintop country, so I started out with my most suitable clothing and gear, including warm shirts, woolen pants, leather jacket, a parka, warm hat and boots. The boots were the same GI-issue that I got when I joined the navy in 1948, and which were rather well-worn from hunting, fishing and work activities.

I reported to Milt Murphy, the engineer in charge of the group, at Hawthorne, some 300 miles southwest of Elko. We would work our way from there eastward across the state to the Utah border. It was soon apparent that my navy boots were not up to the job and, at my first opportunity, I located a general merchandise store in Hawthorne and found a pair of ankle-high leather boots to replace them. They had rawhide laces and composition soles and were, I was assured, what the local miners and construction workers wore.

The boots (I can't remember the brand) not only served me well throughout my tour with the selection team that spring, but also became my usual footwear for all future outdoor endeavors. My old navy boots were discarded.

In the fall, when I broke them in to the rocks and mud and snow of the hunt, I realized that, superior as only leather can be, if I wanted them to last I should take better care of them. I was fortunate in that a friend of mine, a lineman, recommended a brand of dressing that he used and that worked well for him. And that was my introduction to "SNO-SEAL." Without a doubt, it was that product that allowed me to use my boots from 1963 until the present; a fact that is doubly significant since I can't find an equivalent pair to take their place.



And what a pair they are! The places they have taken me, and brought me back, could well compare with the seven-league boots of a Roman soldier. To begin with they were my everyday shoe at work, when I helped maintain Nevada Bell and AT&T cable and radio-relay stations from Wendover to McCoy in Nevada. That involved all kinds of weather and conditions, rain, snow, mud or sand. They found the trails of countless rabbits and deer in Elko County. They helped me find the best ponds and creeks for waterfowl, the best canyons and springs for game birds. They protected me from underfoot rattlers. They helped me navigate mountain creeks along cut-banks and through almost impenetrable bushes in search of the most ideal fishing holes, even getting soaked when forced to ford a stream.

They were with me on hundreds of California and Nevada mountains, some at over 10,000-feet in elevation. They helped me climb the steep ledges to the 3,172' above-sea-level summit of Mt. Monadnock in New Hampshire, one of the two most-climbed mountains in the world. They descended the steep trails of the deep canyons in Arizona, where barefooted Anasazi once trod. They kept my feet warm and comfortable in the Colorado Rockies in October, even on snowy Independence Pass at 12,095' asl. They were with me when I needed them on the sharp volcanic flows at Idaho's "Craters of the Moon," and protected my feet from burning at Death Valley's lowest surface at 282' below-sea-level.

But one of my fondest memories was when, in 2001, I went with my son to Barrow, Alaska and stepped into the Arctic Ocean. I stood there a few seconds and looked down at the frigid water lapping over my wonderful old boots. "This is your final dunking," I thought to myself. We're both too old for this sort of thing. (They were only 28-years old then but I've kept my word; I have never forced them into ankle-deep water again.

Why have I dubbed them my "seven-league" boots? I guess because of their almost mythical endurance. The "league," according to the old timers, was a measure used by the Roman Armies. One league was considered a reasonable distance to march in an hour, and would equate to the normal three miles-per-hour march or walk today. And seven leagues, or twenty-one miles, would have been a good day's march.

The legendary seven-league boots, from European folklore, would allow the wearer to take great strides - seven leagues at each step - resulting in great speed. The idea may have come from the practice of horse-messengers having their boots only touch the ground every seven leagues, when changing their tired horse for a fresh one.

It is too much for me to recall or calculate just how many leagues I walked and hiked in my boots. Suffice to say that while wearing them, I experienced many of my most favorite journeys - short and long, difficult and easy. In truth, my boots have been closer to me for the longest time of any piece of apparel I ever owned. They are now approaching a half-century of age. I wonder how long the cow wore that hide before I got it. And, I wonder and how much longer I'll be able to pull my favorite boots on and lace them up for a comfortable walk-about or a hike in the hills.