

Wet Feet

The day started normally – I was running late - but I took the dogs down to our local trails anyway. The snow is marginal on the trails so I'm running 2 teams of 7 dogs. Ran the first team and noticed that one of my favorite parts of the trail, which runs for about 3/4 mile on the mud flats of Knik Arm of Cook Inlet had iced up over most of the distance. Now the large spring and fall tides will cover this area, but this time of year much water is unusual. I've have seen an inch or two in years past when a storm raises the tide and figure this is what must have happened. I notice that the tide is out - or mostly so. The dogs handle it well - we are about 15 miles into a 20 mile run.

Now I'm back with the second team about 3 hours later (it's now dark) and as I come onto the inlet I notice an area of overflow - the dogs charge into it and it's about 1 inch deep and maybe 10 feet long - just a good training exercise. Just about the 1 to 2 inches I expect at high tide.

Well you know fools rush in where angels fear to tread. Not more than 15 feet later there is more water over the trail. The dogs are doing very well - but this is about 2 inches deep and maybe 50 feet long. After that there is more and I can't see the end of it - but the first two were easy and the dogs did so well I'm not concerned. But this one quickly goes from 1" to 3 or 4 inches. The toboggan sled is riding up a little in the front - and I notice that my left foot is wet (and cold!). I'm wearing an old pair of Sorrels and the left boot has a major rip in the rubber boot that's patched with duct tape (fixes anything but a broken heart and the crack of dawn). Well this is inconvenient, but not tragic. It's only 3 miles or so to the truck by the shortest path - the puppies won't get to run, and this team will be cut short - but they will survive.

The dogs are doing great, but the water gets deeper - now 6 inches and looks like it goes the rest of the 3/4 mile mud flat section. This part of the trail runs beside a deep (8 foot?) channel in the mud flat and now the water is over the top of my right boot also - both feet are wet. Suddenly my leader gets confused and veers to the right – heading towards the flooded channel - I call him back and we go on about 50 feet - then both leaders stop and try to go back. This would have been a great idea at the beginning, but we are better than 1/2 way across. I jump off the sled - stop the leaders and turn them around - start to lead them down the trail, but the water is so high I can't find the trail. Of course, the dogs are now tangled into a large ball. Finally I give up and walk the dogs back to higher ground at the edge of the mud flat (about 200 ft away from the trail) - but the only dog who wants to go with me is my wheel dog - who is now ahead of the leaders.

I've tried to explain to the dogs about clipping (dragging the gangline against the back of my knee) but they never listen - sure enough they drop me to my knees in the water several times. As I get up the last time - feet are becoming numb - I'm very grateful it's only 27 deg F. Then I notice all the ice chunks are moving past me to higher ground! The tide is still coming in! (For those who don't know we get over 30 foot tides in this country). Finally get the dogs to dry ground and undone this massive tangle - takes about

10 minutes on very cold feet. When I'm finally done the water there is 3 inches deep (it was dry when I started!),

Luckily at this point my leader recognizes an old trail we used to take when water covered the outer trail and plows through the now 4 inch water to the end of the mud flat section and we climb out to higher ground.

The run to the truck was particularly spirited - and quickly the dogs were loaded into straw filled boxes - engine started - water poured out of boots - and a fast drive home.

Alls well that ends well - everybody is warm and fine with nothing more than a good story to tell, but if it had been cold out this could have been really interesting.

Eric

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