

NIKWAX IN THE HIGH COUNTRY

If you're like me and find maintenance of your hunting kit a bit of a tedious – and hence neglected – chore you'll be pleasantly surprised with the UK-based Nikwax Waterproofing line of products. **BY ROGER STOKES**

Tight Lines Ltd, their NZ distributor, sent NZ Rod&Rifle a selection of their rainwear, boot and down care products, and I was pleased to receive them while packing for a week of late autumn 2017 Otago tops hunting, where I planned to look over a lot of new country.

We Kiwis give our rainwear a really hard time, carrying heavy packs or freshly-killed carcasses, crawling under mossy logs and through bogs, and sweating up a storm on those big uphill drags. This treatment quickly soils the fabric of our expensive breathable coats and before we know it we're complaining that our fabrics are 'wetting out'. When this happens the breathability fails as the pores are soaked and blocked, the coat feels cold and clammy to wear and is slow to dry.

It's time to restore the durable water repellence (DWR) of the fabric. This was now an issue with my go-to Stoney Creek raincoat so it was first to get the 2-stage Nikwax treatment, which can be done by hand or in a front-loader washing machine. First, a clean with their Tech Wash® - and I did this as a hand wash so I could see how much dirt came out of what



ABOVE: (TOP) NIKWAX FOOTWEAR CARE PRODUCTS. (BOTTOM) NIKWAX FABRIC AND DOWN PROOFING PRODUCTS.

LEFT: 'BEFORE-AND-AFTER' RESULTS WERE DRAMATIC for my old rain coat after a 2-stage Nikwax treatment. After the Nikwax waterproofing, water beaded on the surface and shed off with very little fabric wetting.

appeared at first glance to be a clean coat. I was quite shocked as the water turned brown. Next came the TX.Direct® water repellent coating; with gloved hands, agitate and soak the garment in the solution - easy as!

As can be seen in the 'before-and-after' pictures, the results were dramatic. The wear areas of the shoulders and back used to quickly 'wet out'; now they bead water and shed it off.

Next to benefit were my Lowa alpine boots with their breathable Gore-Tex liners. Boot leather pores must also be kept breathable for the sake of your foot comfort and health - and for your mates' noses when you take your boots off in the hut at the end of a long hot day on the hill! If heavy greasy leather treatments are used to block the pores you'll turn your expensive boots into modern day

equivalents of the old rubber 'Bullers' that us older stalkers now shudder to remember. The leather must also be nourished as all leathers leach out their dressings in the wet and harsh NZ environments, leading to stiffness and premature cracking at flex points when they dry out.

First comes a surface clean with the Nikwax Footwear Cleaning Gel™; spread on with the sponge applicator, then a quick coat of either the Nubuck & Suede Proof™ (textured leather), Fabric & Leather Proof™ (fabric or combination) or Waterproofing Wax for Leather™ (smooth leather). As my boots had nubuck leather with open pores from regular use they got the Nubuck & Suede Proof™ dressing, also quickly applied with a sponge applicator.

The final Nikwax treat for my gear was the Down Wash Direct for my Kathmandu down sleeping bag, to restore water repellence to the shell fabric and boost the loft and water repellence of the down - especially in the grubby contact areas around the hood and foot box. This was done in the bath via a hand wash, then a spin dry. Just remember that the down clumps need to be teased apart for drying, and bags can take several days to dry after a full clean like this.

NIKWAX OUT ON THE HILL

As usual I had a great trip in the mountains, moving my camp at least every 2 days and seeing stags daily; including the best royal stag I've seen in my 34 years of hunting DOC land. My companion hunted him up, but that's a story for another day.

I was delighted with how much better my raincoat shed the rain on the day we climbed from the rainy beech forest up over the tops, popping in and out of the cloud and rain showers. When I packed the coat away it was basically dry after a good shake; no need to get it out again to dry it. It felt better on any bare skin too, not being damp and cold, and the

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consequent improvement in breathability helped with comfort control on the big climb.

Likewise my boots felt supple all week and didn't soak up water around the worn areas. My sleeping bag kept me warm and dry, even when the 3 litre water container under the fly froze solid overnight!

In summary: gear maintenance is essential to get top performance out of your investment in quality hunting equipment. I found the Nikwax products met their promises, and they really couldn't have been easier to apply. So I'm happy to recommend that you search them out when you're next at your favourite outdoors store - and they may even save you from needing to buy that pricey new gear, once you see how much you've revitalised your favourite old kit! ■

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