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Innovative products take bite out of pesky bug problem

BY CHESTER ALLEN

OUTDOORS

I've had mosquitoes, deerflies, horseflies and no-see-ums jab right through my shirt in the past, but a new breed of outdoor clothing is putting the hurt on the bugs.



I've just returned from a week of fishing rivers and streams in the northeast corner of Yellowstone National Park, which is one buggy place.

Thousands of elk, bison, deer and other big animals make the Lamar Valley and Slough Creek a juicy paradise for biting bugs -- especially the ravenous, vicious deerfly, which takes a chunk of flesh with every bite.

I've seen hikers with bloody trails on their legs sprinting

down the steep Slough Creek trail to their cars.

In past years, I've gritted my teeth and slathered on eye-watering amounts of DEET bug sprays. Those sprays work, but they melt the plastic on my fly lines. That makes me wonder what that stuff is doing to ME.

Bug spray also makes me feel like I've rolled in a toxic waste dump.

So, I bought two shirts, two bandanas and a hat treated with Buzz Off. I also bought a few Bug Bam! Insect repellent wristbands.

And then I crept out to brave the Yellowstone bugs.

I did spray on modest doses of DEET the first couple of days -- I was pretty nervous about those deerflies -- but I noticed bugs landing on my shirt and immediately flying off.

So, I just put on a Buzz Off shirt, a Bug Bam! wristband on my wrist -- and another Bug Bam! wristband on the back of my cap -- and went off to fish Soda Butte Creek.

I didn't get bitten once.

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I forgot about the biting bugs and lost myself casting to big Yellowstone cutthroat trout rising in glass-clear water. I even caught a few of them.

It was a breezy day, but it's usually windy at Soda Butte and the rest of the Lamar Valley. I've had windy days out there where six or seven bugs munched the tiny spot on the back of my neck that didn't get any DEET.

I watched deerflies and horseflies veer away from my immediate area when I was eating a sandwich.

That moment made spending \$70 for a fishing shirt seem like the bargain of the year.

Clothes treated with Buzz Off usually are expensive. I did find a nice pullover shirt on sale at Bass Pro Shops for \$25, but most shirts range from \$60 to \$85.

This seems like a lot of money to pay for a shirt -- especially when the Permethrin treatment that repels the bugs wears off after 25 washings. But not having to worry about bugs eating me alive made the cost worthwhile.

As I understand it, Permethrin is a natural, non-toxic chemical that repels bugs.

I did a little bit of research before I forked over my money, and I discovered that:

- **Buzz Off-treated clothes** don't smell like bug juice, and the fabric feels normal.
- **Dry cleaning the clothes** wrecks the bug repellent feature.
- **A lot of quality outdoor** clothes companies, such as L.L. Bean, Orvis, ExOfficio and Bass Pro Shops offer clothes treated with Buzz Off.
- **Local outdoor stores**, such as Alpine Experience and Olympic Outfitters, carry Buzz Off clothes.

But nothing convinced me more than a fishing trip to Costa Rica this past spring.

Harold Long, my father-in-law and fishing partner, wore Buzz Off clothes during our trip, and he didn't get bitten once.

We were in a *tropical jungle*, and Harold didn't get munched.

So, I bit on the Buzz Off, and I'm glad I did.

If you're worried about the cost, try buying a long-sleeve Buzz Off shirt and a Buzz Off hat before you head to buggy country.

You can wash them -- or at least rinse them out -- every couple of days or so.

I don't plan to wear my Buzz Off clothes around town. I'm going to save them for trips to the Cascades, Yellowstone and other buggy spots.

I think I'm going to make a little hash mark on the shirttail every time I wash it, so I can keep track of how long it will remain effective.

I also used the Bug Bam! bracelets along with the Buzz Off clothes.

I noticed that a bracelet on my arm and another looped in the back of my hat kept bugs away. Maybe the Buzz Off clothes didn't need the help, but it seemed like the combination of the two was a wicked one-two punch on the nasty flies and mosquitoes.

The Bug Bam! bracelet, which is laced with citronella and other natural oils, is

supposed to last 100 hours.

I used two during my Yellowstone trip, and they seemed to last longer than advertised.

Bug Bam! is a good product, and it's a lot nicer to wear than DEET-laced lotions and sprays. The bracelets also kept bugs away during quick trips outside when I wasn't wearing my Buzz Off shirt or hat.

Please know that I don't get a dime -- or free stuff -- from Buzz Off or Bug Bam!

I don't want to look like a shill here -- and I'll still keep DEET in my duffel just in case.

But this new stuff works like nothing else I've tried during 38 years outdoors with fanged, flying insects.


I just spent eight days in Yellowstone, and I didn't get one mosquito or fly bite.

I know what I want for Christmas this year.

Olympian outdoors writer Chester Allen's outdoors column appears Tuesdays. He can be reached at 360-754-4226 or callen@theolympian.com.

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