

Leggings, Mitasses, Botas”¹

The Metis often wore hide leggings over cloth trousers, especially Metis employed by the fur trade companies. This was to protect their expensive cloth trousers from wear. For the Metis riders on the Great Plains these were the typical leggings worn to protect riders from thorns and brush scrapes. In the western United States, half-leggings are known as “botas”. The Metis mitasses worn on the Upper Missouri River are very similar to the chaps worn by the Mexican cowboys encountered on the Santa Fe Trail. In winter both men and women would wear cloth or skin leggings. In the United States, half-leggings are known as “botas” or “botte” from the French word for a high boot.



Mitasses made by Mathilde Carrière-Perreault, Le Musée de Saint-Boniface,
photo by Lawrence Barkwell

¹ Portions reprinted from L. J. Barkwell, L. Dorion and A. Hourie (Eds.) *Metis Legacy: Michif Culture, Folkways and Heritage*. Saskatoon: Pemmican Publications and Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2006: 78.



Detail from the Perreault Leggings
Photo by L. Barkwell

Terry Nault-Mimka tells us that she found her grandmother Perreault's leggings rolled up in a trunk in a closet. For safekeeping the family turned them over to Le Musee de Saint-Boniface. This is some of the most extraordinary Metis artistry in beadwork that we have seen. The beadwork is done in very small (#14) beads. The dimensions are 36cm. width and 53-cm. length. Given the length and the fact they are fully beaded we assume these were being made for her husband or another male in the family. Women's leggings were usually only beaded in a band near the bottom where they showed below the long dresses of the day.



Gary Johnson Sr. (left), Gary Jr. (right), both wearing Half Leggings or Botas.



An example of women's half-leggings.



NWT Legging detail, downloaded 1/9/10 from
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/cinnachick/4814509152/>

Athapaskan, probably Slavey or Slavey-Metis
Northwest Territory, Canada
circa 1875
Wool cloth, glass, and metal beads

The cut layers of wool stacked on top of each other were amazing. The precise cuts, the delicate filigree cutwork. They tiny, tiny stitches. The size 11 or 12 seed beads that are a mix of metal and glass. The attention to detail of creating veins in the leaves by using a different color green. That swirly silver shape with red beads off of it, the swirls and interlocking swirls, the border of beads that looks like a zipper. Such amazing detailed work and this image shows a small corner of one legging. the beading continued from knee to ankle and is about 8" wide.