

# Canoe Float Trip On Wood River Nets Good Shooting



**FAT MALLARD DRAKE** — The first duck of the trip waited too long after his friends flew off ahead of him. He didn't jump until the canoe came into view around the bend and then it was too late. When he spooked, he flew straight up, like most puddlers, making an easy shot. The boards are part of a fallen bridge . . . one of the few obstacles across the Wood.

By GEORGE ALOTRICO

This was the time for a float trip. The last week of the season brought ideal conditions. The week before had been cold and the lakes and tule sloughs were frozen over. If there were any ducks left they'd be in the open waters of fast running trout streams and rivers. The question was, were there any ducks left?

The predictions for the 1962 season had been gloomy and the statistics showed a bad year compared to the seasons before. Sporting goods stores sold few shells, motels suffered and even the duck and goose picking establishments closed down early for lack of business.

Everyone said now that the season was nearing its end there were few ducks left in the eastern part of the state. Even so, I thought, wouldn't those few be concentrated on the rivers? Well, it was worth a try.

I decided to put in at Jackson Kimball Park at the source of the Wood River where the spring waters gush out and immediately form a full size trout stream. A two-mile float down to the confluence of Annie Creek would make a nice comfortable two-hour trip that wouldn't have to be rushed.

The fairly wide river bends and turns frequently through the low farm land north of Fort Klamath. It gets narrower, deepens and picks up speed where Annie pours in. After the float, the one and one-half mile walk back to the park on State 232 would be snap.

I've found you don't have to get up with the birds to find good shooting on a river. The ducks usually stay in the river all day feeding and resting at will. I haven't found that river ducks fly out and feed in the fields and then come back in the evening. Larger flocks on big rivers may do this, but the small flocks on streams usually puddle around in their favorite stretches all day.

I put my canoe in at noon and started slowly coursing downstream. Silence is all important on a float, the slightest noise will flush out a flock six bends downstream. The best procedure is to cross from bank to bank around each bend hunching down low. This enables the hunter to

use every bit of available cover on the banks for concealment.

When you take the tight turn on the inside of each bend you usually find you're right on top of them within easy range. That's why 7's are all that's necessary for this type of shooting. Puddlers like mallards and pintails will generally flare straight up making shooting duck soup, if you'll excuse the pun.

The larger shot size won't give much of a pattern at close range, but the 7's open up quickly and the pattern is hard to fly through. Floats are usually full of surprises and my first one came as I rounded the first bend, paddle clutched tightly in hand.

The pair of mallards were close to the bank near a little clump of overhanging brush. I didn't spot them until they jumped about 15 yards away. Instead of flaring downstream they whizzed straight over my head making an impossible shot, especially with that canoe paddle still tightly burning in my hand.

I beached the canoe right away and tied on a three-foot length of rope to the paddle and canoe thwart so I could drop the paddle immediately when I jumped more ducks. It takes too much time to put it down in the canoe or on your lap. When the paddle is tied to the canoe it can be dropped right away so the hunter can reach for the gun quickly. The paddle will just float beside the canoe.

Pushing off again, I heard the familiar sound of a mallard drake gabbling, but the river bends so many times in just a short distance, I couldn't tell exactly what bend he'd be around. I didn't have long to wait. I carelessly hit the side of the canoe with the paddle making a faint noise and the sky was full of ducks . . . all flying south.

A clump of trees was between the gun and the ducks and for the second time, I couldn't touch off a shot. I didn't have long to wait for some action though.

A drake that was with this flock hadn't been frightened by the noise and as I came into full view he jumped. Surprised as I was, I recovered quickly and he came down with a splash as soon



**START AT THE BEGINNING** — This is the main pool at the source of the Wood River in Jackson Kimball Park where the spring water pours out to form a good size trout stream. Some ducks that are jumped further downstream will fly back up and land in this small pond. Most of the

ducks jumped in the headwaters, however, will head down toward Agency Lake. The canoe is canvas and weighs only a bit over 50 pounds. With a carrying yoke it can be handled easily by one man.

as he reached tree top height. As I said before, it's hard to fly through a pattern of 7's.

Only a half hour had passed and I'd seen enough ducks for a couple of days already.

The next surprise came when I had to get out of the canoe to pull it over an old bridge that slowly sank into the river a long time ago. It's at times like this when the most care is needed to avoid noise. I soon found out you can't be too careful.

Slowly, slowly I inched the light canoe over the bridge, my gun resting against the thwart . . . precariously it proved. As the canoe was nearly over the hurdle I started to lower it into the water. That's when the gun slid down the thwart and tumbled into the bottom of the canoe with a clatter.

Again, the sky was full of wings. Just 30 yards away, around the next bend, countless ducks got up with a terrific surge. I quickly reached for my gun, lying miles away it seemed, in the bottom of the canoe. Too late . . .

Only an hour passed and half the trip spent, and I had to sit on the bank for 10 minutes to get hold of myself. The whole business was just a bit unnerving.

As I passed through the quiet slow run that just minutes ago held all the delicious table fare I saw nothing but a few downy duck feathers floating on the water.

I knew what I was going to find around the next bend so I prepared myself. The water ahead courses across a little spit of land flooding a small wooded area. There were always ducks there. As I came around the

bend I lowered the paddle and picked up the gun. Just like clock work, there were, hen and drake in midstream.

They hesitated a fraction of a second and then "blasted off." I downed the drake easily as he was still climbing, but I touched off the second shot just as the veering hen put a bush between us. As I shot the bush exploded and twigs flew all over, but miraculously 20 yards beyond, the hen buckled and fell.

The last shots warned any ducks down as far as Annie and they now would get up at the slightest provocation. I could picture them nervously swimming around, alert, not knowing what to expect. Even the noise of water dripping from the paddle would spook them now. They knew a gun was near.

Goldeneyes and mergansers came into view as I put the last half dozen bends behind me, but if I filled out my bag limit it was going to be with a big mallard drake, I decided.

It happened just before I reached Annie Creek. I came around a bend and faced a long stretch of open water. Forty yards down I spotted one of the biggest flocks of the afternoon. There must have been 20 ducks there . . . all mallards, it looked like.

I only needed one to limit out and I had to hold back because I couldn't take a chance of killing or wounding more than one bird. And at that distance I'd be only flock shooting with my light load.

They were probably out of range anyway. I rationalized, trying to still the temptation of cutting loose.

I had enough now anyway. Those three mallards were down from the grain fields to the north and they were king size. There were a couple of days left before the season ended and I'd be back anyway.



**AN EASY DOUBLE** — There was plenty of time to bag this pair . . . I knew right where they'd be. As I rounded the bend I dropped the paddle and held the gun ready. The drake and hen were right where I thought they'd be. I almost missed the hen as she flared and put a bush between us, but twigs fell all over and she dropped.



**RARE SIGHT OR EYESORE** — This is another shot of the main pool at the source of the river. The water in this pool is extremely clear and deep, and the bottom can be seen easily. Once in a while you can spot a trout cruising along the bottom among the beer cans and pop bottles that thoughtful campers have left behind. The trout just love to read the labels. If you climb the dirt

road high above the pool you can see the cans and bottles glittering like diamonds in the sun. A rare sight. At the upper right, the river starts winding its way to the lake. At this point, the river bottom is cluttered with cans and bottles as if someone had planned on building a bridge or dam for the benefit of other campers.

### SOLVE JOB PROBLEM

**EVANSVILLE, Ind. (UPI)**—Six women in the Vanderburgh County recorder's office have taken \$600 pay cuts rather than have one of them lose her job.

Recorder Clyde Cole said he had approval of a plan offered by the six clerks as their solution to an economy proposal that would have eliminated one of the jobs.

"I'm very happy," he said, "I didn't know which one to let go."

Don Gaspar de Portola, leader of a Spanish expedition to Northern California in 1769, discovered the California redwood.



**COURSING THROUGH FARM LAND** — Not far from its source, the Wood River widens and is perfect for ducks. They're hard to spot when they feed close to shore among the brush, but the brush is also good cov-

er for the hunter and helps him keep out of sight. The river at this point is crystal clear and fishermen have to go a long way to fool trout in this water.



**ANNIE CREEK COMES IN** — Annie Creek, upper right, joins the Wood River here and starts the river moving faster on its way toward the agency. The swifter current starts carving out undercut banks as the deepening river

curves back and forth. After almost three hours of hunting the walk back to the car was easy. The last float trip of the year brought plenty of good shooting and excitement.