

Arizona hunter & angler

April 1991

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**STREAM
CANOEING
IN ARIZONA**

**DEER IN
THE DESERT**

**ANALYSING
THE "ANTIS"
PART II -
OUR "OPPOSITION"**

**NEW LYME
DISEASE
VACCINE**

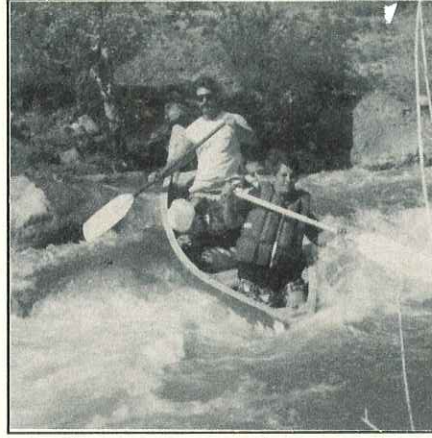
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**Lake of the Month
SAN CARLOS - Dam Area**



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STREAM CANOEING IN ARIZONA

By Jim Slingluff

A sudden splash in the reeds broke the early morning silence. A successful fisherman broke the surface of the water with his prey struggling in his teeth. While still half submerged in the water, he clutched the fish and began eating. The sound of his teeth crunching the bones seemed to echo off the limestone cliffs. As I paddled closer, he dove underwater, then reappeared with his half-eaten meal in his mouth. Another river otter joined him, probably his mate. I chased them around that pool for ten minutes, trying to get a picture. Tiring of my rude intrusion, they swam down a rapid to escape. As I dropped through behind them, one of them popped its head from a quiet backwater, watching as the Verde River carried me out of their home territory.

Canoeing in Arizona has filled my story larder with untold wealth. Tales of two beavers dancing a hunter's moon quadrille with me and a young canoeist, or jump hunting ducks in the depths of the 700-foot-deep Perkinsville Canyon, of seeing the incomparable ecstasy in the face of a 7-year-old tying into a channel cat in the depths of a wilderness river, all help me convince sportsmen to give canoeing Arizona's shallow streams a try.

Most of the people who don't enjoy themselves are victims of their own bad planning. Some of them have no idea how many miles they have obligated themselves to travel. Others hold wildly inaccurate beliefs on how far they can travel in one day. Some are in overloaded canoes on a river section difficult beyond their skills as a paddler. This article, the first of two, will help you avoid some of the common pitfalls of canoeing shallow creeks. A follow-

up article next month will provide detailed information on different sections of the Verde River, including access points, river hazards, and opportunities to hunt and fish.

Why would anyone want to canoe shallow water? I use my canoe to fish, hunt, and explore areas I otherwise would find difficult to get to. Canoes can be used as a pack animal to haul humans and gear into remote areas. While canoes are restricted to watery trails, they are less expensive to buy, feed, and house. Vet bills are a rarity and canoes do not eat the riparian growth or defecate on camp sites.

Hunting big game from canoes beats backpacking with ease. Packing a deer out by canoe is worlds better than packing one out by foot. Don't be put off by a little bit of shallow water either. If the canoe is going to carry you and your gear most of the way, why mind dragging the canoe over short expanses of wet rock now and then? How shallow can you go? My canoe draws 3 inches of water when loaded with 260 pounds of paddler and gear. Add another 100 pounds and it takes 4 inches. Since most canoes are about a yard wide, the theoretical minimum is a stream of water 5 inches deep and four feet wide. Clearly, though, the lighter your canoe, the shallower the water you can boat. Canoes are the only human-powered boat that makes sense to use on our shallow streams. (Use of motors or engines is prohibited on the Verde and Salt, except on the lakes.) Rafts and other inflatables require deeper water than canoes and can't transport hard or sharp-edged loads. Jon-boats are too wide.

Finally, boaters enjoy a legal advantage over land travelers. Under Arizona law, once a boater is on the

river, they have the right to continuous downstream travel even if the river crosses private land.

Not all canoes are created equal. They come in a wide variety of designs and materials. A fiberglass lake canoe, a plastic whitewater canoe, and a cedarwood canoe have about as much in common as a stationwagon, a four-wheel-drive racing truck, and a luxury sedan. It is as important to use the right canoe as it is to use the right car or truck for a given purpose. For example, lake canoes are built to hold a straight line so they are very difficult to turn, especially in current. They are not suited for use in small streams. The best canoe design for stream use is a boat less than 17 feet long, with a flat bottom, with the ends of the canoe elevated about 1 to 2 inches above the midpoint of the boat.

The Verde, Salt, and other Arizona streams are shallow and rocky. I believe plastic canoes are the best single craft to have. They do not conduct heat or cold very well, they are durable, and they slide easily off rocks. Aluminum is noisy, cold in winter, hot in summer, stays dented once dented, and sticks to rocks. Wood and fiberglass lack the durability necessary to boat shallow creeks.

Coleman canoes are the least expensive and most widely available plastic canoe. It is easy to find a used Coleman for sale, or to sell one you find you aren't using. The plastic skin of a Coleman is very durable, but the canoe comes with an internal metal skeleton that can resemble a train wreck if the river takes your boat from you and wraps it around a rock or tree. Still, Coleman is a very good choice as a first canoe, for someone on a family budget, or for the occasional canoeist. Those



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who become enmeshed in the sport of canoeing almost always graduate to some more expensive canoe of a design more specific to the type of paddling they intend to do. Dagger, Old Town, and Mad River canoes are all top notch and all available in Arizona. There is one boat of hybrid material worth a glance. The Pokeboat, by Phoenix, is made of fiberglass cloth embedded in a plastic-like resin. While I've never paddled a Pokeboat, I owned a similarly constructed Phoenix kayak for years and found it was one tough little boat. Phoenix can be contacted for details at 1-800-354-0190.

A couple of years ago, a friend of mine put on the Verde for a five-day trip down the Wild and Scenic section of the Verde. It was a family trip with the canoes overloaded with kids and gear. When they put on the river at Childs, the river was flowing at 200 cubic feet per second. They canoed about four miles to the mouth of Fossil Creek. It rained hard that day and all through that night. When they awoke the next morning, the river had risen over five vertical feet and was flowing at about 20,000 cubic feet per second. It took them two days to line the canoes back to Childs.

It pays to investigate water and weather conditions before starting your trip and to plan accordingly. Like Santa Claus, be making your list and checking them twice. Under certain weather conditions, the Verde and other Arizona streams can increase flow by 1,000-fold in hours. I've seen paddlers exposed to danger, discomfort, and loss of gear for no reason other than their failure to plan. Beyond the obvious, like taking and wearing life jackets, there are some safety concerns of particular emphasis to canoeists.

Know something about the weather that will touch you directly and also the weather that will happen upstream. If you are going to paddle in cold air or on cold water, take extra clothes. Wool or a synthetic designed to retain warmth while wet is best. Cotton is horrible and will often make you colder than if you had no clothes on at all. Sometimes it doesn't pay to be a one-match boy scout. I like to carry a few highway flares to start a fire quickly if someone gets hypothermic. Remember, you are going out on moving water in a small boat. Plan to get wet.

Until you know you can comfortably travel further, I suggest you plan to travel no more than 10 miles per day.

This pace allows time to deal with problems, take your time in camp, and do extra fishing.

You should know what the water level is before you drive to the river. The Salt River Project, as a public service, provides recorded information on the flow of the Salt and Verde Rivers as well as the water levels in the various lakes. You can get this recording by calling (602) 236-5929. For the Verde, any flow above 250 cubic feet per second at the Camp Verde gauge is getting high for those sections above Horseshoe for the casual canoeist. Three conditions will raise the water level quickly: heavy monsoon rain, extended rains, and warm rain on snow packs. Below Horseshoe Dam, the Verde's flow is regulated by the Salt River Project, so flash floods aren't really an issue.

There is some gear useful on the river that may not automatically occur to you. Duct tape can be used to patch holes in waterproofing and canoes. Don't leave home without it. Canoeing is kind of like washing your hands all day long, so hand lotion is a must for multi-day trips. A saw can save your tip, if you dump your canoe and it gets swept into a downed tree or stump. Plastic rain gear or ski clothes help protect your wet body from the wind, even if it is not raining.

There are two iron rules of canoe packing: If you don't want to lose it, tie it in. If you don't want it to get wet, waterproof it.

In order for gear to be effectively waterproof, the package holding it must be strong enough not to tear or puncture during the trip as well as being waterproof when whole. If you just put your gear in trash bags, you run a high risk of having a sodden camp. Military surplus ammo cans and rocket boxes are a low cost way to protect and keep your handguns, optics, cooking gear, cameras, personal items, and lanterns dry. They are durable and easy to tie securely into a canoe. All regular river runners I know use them. Clothes and sleeping bags pack easier when stuffed into something soft-sided. Regular river runners buy plastic or rubber bags designed for this use. You can get almost as much protection with backpacks or duffel bags, plastic bags, and some good ties. Put the gear inside one plastic bag, then squeeze all the air out of the bag and tie it shut. Put that bag inside another plastic bag and squeeze out the air and tie it shut. Now

put that bundle inside of a backpack or duffel bag and close it up. The plastic waterproofs and the outer bag protects the plastic.

If you could be certain you wouldn't upset, you wouldn't have to tie your gear in. If you do turn it over, your gear is likely to face strong surging current doing its level best to tear it out of the boat. Unless you're willing to lose it, tie your gear securely into the canoe. I don't know anyone who ever regretted tying something into a canoe too well. Since it's hard to quickly grab a fishing pole or shotgun that is well tied, I prefer to use lower cost poles and single shot, break-action shotguns which are only lightly secured. This way the pain is less if I lose them.

It is always faster to drag a canoe around a rapid or downed tree than it is to rescue a pinned boat and secure your gear. If you are not willing to face the consequences of a spill, including a swim from the point you tip over, walk around the obstruction. If you do paddle a rapid, try to head for the deepest water, unless it is obstructed by a tree. Deep water may swamp your boat, but your chances of seeing your canoe wrapped around a rock are greater in shallow water. Stay away from downed trees in fast current. These "strainers" or "sweepers" are one of the biggest dangers you face on the river. They allow the current to pass through while trapping solid objects like boats and people. They are often involved in the very few canoe-related deaths that occur in the U.S. each year. If you have space, tie car or truck inner tubes under the thwarts. They displace water, making the canoe ride higher is you swamp. A canoe with extra flotation is easier to handle, easier to rescue, and less likely to wrap around an obstruction. Always paddle from your knees, or while sitting on the floor when you are in rough water. The increased stability will help keep you upright.

If the river gods do seize your canoe, do not allow yourself to be downstream of a swamped canoe. A swamped canoe often weighs over one ton. Should you become pinned between a rock or tree on one side and a swamped canoe on the other, you will be the filing of a very messy sandwich. If the canoe is pinned on a rock, usually one end of the canoe will be less exposed to the force of the current. While staying up-river of the wreck, go to that end of the canoe and try to lift it out of the river. The current will usually then grab the

INFORMATION ON THE VERDE

For those of you who are interested in learning more about the Verde, and perhaps doing some exploring, here are some sources of information and some businesses that would love to help you see the Verde first hand.

PRESCOTT NATIONAL FOREST
Chino Valley District Office (602) 636-2302. Call for information about road conditions and the river above the Verde Valley.

Verde District Office (602) 567-4121. Call for information about road conditions and the river below Camp Verde and above Childs.

TONTO NATIONAL FOREST
Cave Creek District Office (602) 488-3441. Call for information about the Verde down-river of Childs and for road conditions.

BUSINESSES

Arizona Central-Verde River Canyon Railroad (602) 639-0010. Call for information about shuttle service along the Verde up-river of the Verde Valley.

Quintus Enterprises (602) 567-3035. Rents canoes and offers shuttle services out of Camp Verde.

Outdoor Adventure (Vince Van Horn) (602) 567-9579. Rents canoes and shuttle services out of Camp Verde.

Desert Voyagers 1-800-222-RAFT. Outfits and guides trips in inflatable kayaks below Beasley Flat to the Salt River.

Worldwide Explorations (602) 774-6462. Outfits and guides trips in inflatable kayaks from the Verde Valley to the Salt River.

BOOKS

Verde River Recreation Guide, by Jim Slingsluff. Published by Golden West Publishers of Phoenix. In the book Jim tells you how to get to the river, describes the river by sections, provides canoeing safety advice, and describes the plants, animals, and people you might encounter, all for \$5.95, at better book stores.

other end and spin the boat off the rock. If you are pinned against a tree, you can use this same technique. However, often the job can be made easier by taking your saw and cutting away all or part of the wood. Remember, stay upstream of the wreck. When working around a pinned canoe, be very careful to not become entangled in loose lines. Be especially careful of loose lines with fish hooks on the end.

Rivers only flow one way, which makes round trips difficult. Arranging the shuttle can be a problem, especially for the solo canoeist. Sometimes you can convince trusted buddies to take a camping trip, using your vehicles, in return for dropping you off and picking you up. Sometimes you can find reliable locals who, for a fee, will drop you off, keep your truck safe, and pick you up. If you don't know anyone, try asking the local chambers of commerce or district Forest Service offices. Sometimes they know of retired folks who like the chance to see things and be helpful. There may be companies, such as Quintus Marine in Camp Verde, which will run your shuttle for a fee. If all else fails, you can run the shuttle yourself, though this will take time from your canoeing.

Don't be put off by all these cautions. Lots of outdoorsmen with minimal canoe skills use canoes to hunt and fish sections of the Verde and the Salt every year and most have no problems beyond an occasional swamped canoe.

If you use common sense and apply your other outdoor skills, any problems you face should be minimal. I regularly canoe with inexperienced canoeists, many of whom are small children. If you pace your trip to allow swimming and bug chasing, having kids along will be a special pleasure, not a chore.

If you want more details on canoeing advice, I suggest my book, *Verde River Recreation Guide*, which is published by Golden West Publishers. A good book for detailed instruction in paddling techniques is *Canoeing: Skills for the Serious Paddler* written by Dave Harrison and published by Sports Illustrated. A good video for canoe instruction is *Guide to Canoeing* by L.L. Bean.

Next month I'll tell you where you can go canoeing or hike in to hunt or fish on different sections of the Verde River. I'll discuss access, hazards you might encounter along the river, and what you might find to hunt and fish.

