

# Arizona hunter & angler

May 1991  
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**MUZZLE LOADING  
GOES MODERN**

**Trail of the Month  
WHYTES LOOP**

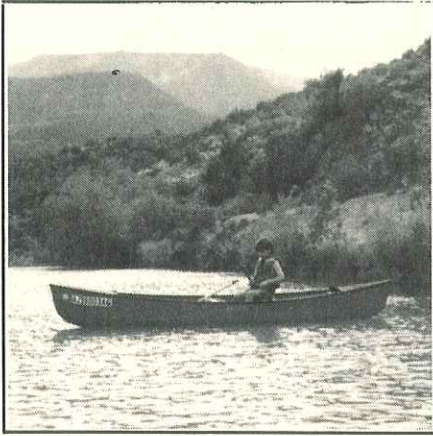
**HERITAGE  
CONCEPTS**

**ON THE RIVER  
PART II**



**Lake of the Month  
SAN CARLOS – Upper Area**





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Arizona  
**hunter**  
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# ON THE RIVER

By Jim Slingluff

*(Editor's Note: This is the second in a two-part series on canoeing the Verde River for hunting and fishing.)*

Last month, we discussed canoeing Arizona's streams and the equipment needed to do it safely. It's time to go canoeing. We'll be canoeing the Verde River looking for hunting and fishing opportunities. The Verde is the stream which is most easily accessed by most Arizona residents. Besides, for most of its length, it's mellow enough for casual canoeists. The land around this river varies from rural to wild isolation. There is much to explore and a lot of hunting and fishing to do. The number of days stated after the mileage for each section is my recommendation for a non-frantic pace at normal water levels. We start between Prescott and Ash Fork. We're in grasslands here and might very well see antelope on our drive to the river.

## **Morgan Ranch to Perkinsville (25 miles, 3 days)**

Until a few years ago, it was possible to drive to the very point where the Verde becomes a perennial stream. No longer. Someone went in and torched one of the isolated buildings connected with the Morgan Ranch and the owners closed the road. It's a sorry shame, but you can't blame the owners. Canoeists can get in here only with advance permission. For the first few miles of life, the Verde flows over private land. Until reaching Forest Road 638, some 6 miles below Morgan Ranch, there is no way to drive to the Verde without acquiring landowner permission in advance.

The creek up here is shallow and clear. There are lots of beavers and some beaver dams, as well as river otters and muskrats. Most of the fish are natives and not sought by most fishermen, though our pioneer ancestors weren't so fussy. There are largemouth and smallmouth bass, in addition to channel cats and carp, but their populations are spotty. There are sometimes lots of fish in those spotty populations, especially the smallmouths. Try fishing pools over-

hung with brush, no matter how small the creek is. It was on an Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) research trip once when we shocked up over 30 bass from an area smaller than most living rooms. There are quail, as well as the falcons, that prey on them.

Forest Road 638 is presently open from both the north and south side of the river. You can get up-to-date information on road conditions by calling the Chino Valley District Office of the Prescott Forest at 602-636-2302. Forest Road 635, downriver of 638, is usually closed at the property lines of the Verde Ranch. However, it is possible to hike into the Verde either by following the fence lines or by hiking in off closed forest roads which spur off on both the north and south sides of the river. Below the Verde Ranch, the creek pools up some, creating enough habitat for healthy catfish and the river otters that chase them. Eleven miles into its journey, the Verde enters a 400-foot deep canyon. For the next 10 miles, to Perkinsville, the creek stays



**Author's son fishes a deep pool near Gap Creek.**

boxed up. At Bear Siding, also known as US Mines, there are again pools holding bass and catfish. You can drive almost to the river at US Mines using Forest Road 492A. This is a beautiful section in here with some resident javelina and mule deer. I canoed within handgun range of javelina here during one December trip. They had no idea what I was. As we near Perkinsville, we see the largest, and last, beaver dam on the main stem of the Verde. Beaver live downstream from here, but they don't build dams.

At Perkinsville, there is a large pool with fish and bullfrogs. You can drive

to this point using Forest Road 354 out of Williams or 318 out of Jerome.

## **Perkinsville to Tuzigoot Bridge (25 miles, 3 days)**

About a mile below the Perkinsville Bridge, the stream starts to canyon up and form pools separated by shallow riffles. You are once again on public land. The railroad track from Cottonwood to Drake joins the river here, running in tandem with it for the next 12-or-so miles. This track helps ease hiker access. A tourist run has been opened here and it is possible to buy a train ticket that will take you out of Cottonwood, up through the river canyon, and back to Cottonwood. Call the Arizona Central-Verde River Canyon Railroad at 602-639-0010 for details. This railroad will run shuttle service for hikers, sportsmen, and canoeists, dropping you off along the track and picking you up on a return trip. It's the best shuttle in the southwest.

This is, perhaps, the most beautiful section of the Verde. In places the red wall limestone cliffs are over 700 feet high. Late in the season there are heavy populations of waterfowl in the deep canyons between here and the Verde Valley. I've had excellent luck jump-hunting for ducks along here, either from canoe or by foot. These waterfowl and the fish in the clear shallow water attract bald eagles, osprey, and blue herons, some of whom stay to nest. River otters hunt the creek. Look for their scat on mid-stream boulders. Anglers will find smallmouths, unless there has been a recent flash flood. There are lots of small caves in the limestone cliffs to search out, a few of which hold the small corn cobs of the early native Americans.

Nine miles below Perkinsville, the famous Sycamore Canyon enters from the left. Downriver from here, the populations of bass, catfish, and carp take control of the river and crowd out the native fish. Bow-fishing for carp provides good sport, but the creek bottom is rocky and will chew up your arrows. The river is cradled by the black cliff walls of basalt. The shoreline below the cliffs, as well as the flats above the cliffs, often hold large



coveys of quail. You can get into this area using Forest Road 131 off the Tuzigoot Monument Road. On the Forest Service maps, this area is called Duff Flats. As the Verde flows into the Verde Valley, the basalt cliffs melt away. The land here is private and remains so, except for periodic spots, for the next 40 miles. This is not a problem to canoeists with their legal rights to downstream passage. Hikers or horsemen will face greater difficulty. Forest Road 131 is used by lots of folk to access the river at a variety of points from Sycamore Canyon to the Tuzigoot Bridge. They come to swim, fish, hunt quail, canoe, tube, and picnic. This is nice stuff in here. Give it a try. Canoeists should show some caution near the diversion dam for Pecks Lake. It need not be dangerous, but it is 8 feet high with swift currents near the mouth of the diversion ditch. By the time you hit the bridge, you have been with the Verde for about 50 miles.

#### **Tuzigoot Bridge to Beasley Flat (40 miles, 4-5 days)**

A mile or so below the Tuzigoot Bridge, virtually the entire river disappears into the Cottonwood Ditch. There is less water left in the river than existed 50 miles upstream. The river fights back with courage and within 2 miles, at Dead Horse Ranch State Park, it can be called a creek, though perhaps not a river.

Dead Horse Park is a good place to picnic, camp, fish, or put your canoe on the creek. The pond and the Verde are stocked with trout in the winter. You can fish for catfish, carp, and bass any time. From Dead Horse to Bridgeport, four miles downstream, the creek is too shallow to enjoyably canoe if the Camp Verde gauge is below 100 cfs. At flows between 100 and 300 cfs, though, it's a nice mellow run with pretty views and good fishing. Bridgeport, where Route 89A crosses the Verde, to Bignott Beach is a good 6 mile trip for anglers, beginning canoeists, or those wanting a mellow trip. In a few years, river access spots will be developed at the mouth of Black Canyon, two miles above Bignott Beach. Since this is public land, you can camp there now. There are no boundary markers, so you will need to use a topo map to make sure you are at the right spot. The access at Bignott Beach is reached by taking the turn into the Thousand Trails Campground off Route 89 and then turning left at the sign saying "Bignott Beach".

From Bignott Beach to the General Crook Highway Bridge at Camp Verde (13-14 miles), the river is generally wide, shallow, and open. There can be good fishing in here with the only modern instance of a squawfish being taken by hook and line from the Verde having occurred here in one of the gravel pits that otherwise mar the river banks. The land is either private or Indian reservations, so plan to canoe the whole way through Camp Verde.

The Prescott Forest offers a free map for the Verde which covers from the General Crook Highway to Sheep Bridge (70 miles). It is a good map, but



**Author slips down the Verde on a deer hunting trip.**

many of the comments written on it are out-of-date or inaccurate at lower flows. The comments were written based on raft trips down at high flows and the bias shows. The Verde District Ranger Station is your best source of recent information about the Verde through here, as well as possible shuttle drivers.

The section from where the General Crook Highway crosses the Verde to Beasley Flat, about 10 miles, is the most popular novice canoe run on the Verde, and with good reason. As long as the Salt River Project reports the gauge at Camp Verde to read 65 cfs or higher, there is enough water in the river to keep you inside your canoe most of the time. There are bass and catfish in the water and a wide variety of bird life to watch. The river is easy, safe, and scenic. You'll have fun here. You can make this an easy overnight trip by camping on the small parcel of public land found at the mouth of West Clear Creek. Eventually this spot, too, will be developed using State Lake Improvement Fund (SLIF) monies, but right now it's just an open cottonwood bench. There are no boundary markers, so pay close attention to your map. As you make the big bend around Beasley Flat, you're once again on public land. There are lots of ways

down to the river off Forest Road 334 (take the Salt Mine road out of Camp Verde and follow the signs), so expect to see fishermen and families camping. At the end of Beasley Flat is an official Forest Service river access point which is slated for picnic tables and other improvements. If the river gauge at Camp Verde reads above 500 cfs, this spot could be crowded with whitewater paddlers and rafters. The Verde is changing its nature here and the going may get rough. At the river access point at Beasley Flat, the Verde is almost 90 miles old.

#### **Beasley Flat to Horseshoe Dam (60 miles, 6 days)**

We are about to step off the edge here. Upriver from here, the river varies between rural and remote, but nothing like the rough isolation downriver from here. Upriver is some hunting and good fishing, but nothing like the action below this point. There are a few rapids upstream, but nothing like what can develop starting here. Most of the next 60 miles has been recognized by Congress as one of our nationally unique riparian areas. This section has been mentioned in national magazines catering to whitewater enthusiasts. Put your life jackets on and tie down your gear.

Most of the rapids which will insist that you pay very close attention to them are in the first 10 miles of the trip. Off the Wall, PreFalls, Falls, Postfalls, Sycamore Creek, Turkey Gobbler (also called Punk Rock), and Bushman all deserve your respect. The combination of PreFalls, Falls, and Postfalls starting about 2 miles below Beasley can seriously damage you as well as your boat if you are disrespectful.

If the gauge at Camp Verde reads below 300 cfs, canoeists without whitewater training will probably be okay, as long as they aren't too proud to line the canoes around a rapid that bothers them. At flows below 200 cfs, most of the rapids are not intimidating, although they can take your boat from you and pin it to a rock. At flows above 500 cfs, an upset might lead you to a longer swim than you really want. At flows over 1000 cfs, expect to see five-foot waves and holes big enough to flip your canoe end-over-end-over-end.

Most of the area below here is virtually unhunted and only lightly fished. There are a few of us that go in here after deer, javelina, and predators. I have had interactions with game



animals in here that have me convinced I was the first human they had ever seen. This whole area is good wildlife habitat. If you want to increase your odds, concentrate your hunt where two side canyons touch the Verde from opposite sides, yet close to each other, and where shallow sections allow for easy crossing. Much of the river below Childs is home to bronzebacks that haven't seen a hook for generations. Try fishing in October when the smallmouths feed hard in preparation for the winter.

Below Beasley, the only points you can drive to the river are Childs (about 20 miles downstream), Red Creek (22 miles below Childs), Sheep Bridge (10 miles below Red Creek), and Horseshoe Dam. It is possible to drive close to the river at Gap Creek, using Forest Road 574. At times, you can drive to a point just above the Falls, but for half the year, January to June, land travel is forbidden in that part of the watershed to avoid disturbing a bald eagle nest. Those with four-wheel drive can reach the river at Red Creek by making connections with unofficial roads off Forest Road 18. Sheep Bridge is accessible through Forest Road 205.

You can drive into Childs using Forest Roads 708 and 502. There is an official campground at Childs, as well as a hot springs. This used to be a pretty strange place at times, but things have improved dramatically since the Forest Service put a campground host here. Still, expect to see nudity, especially at the springs. Below Childs, you enter a designated Wilderness Area. There are rapids down here, but they are usually not very big or powerful. You are a long way from help, so be careful. I could spend months in here. From Childs to the Dam, or from Childs to Sheep Bridge, is the best wilderness canoe trip in Arizona which is also safe for canoeists not trained in whitewater. If you do this near the end of the waterfowl season, take along some goose loads.

The upper end of Horseshoe Lake is sometimes a problem because of sand or mud flats. You are least likely to hit this sticky stuff if the lake is rising. The bass fishing and hunting for waterfowl and javelina can be real exciting at the upper end of this lake.

The dam marks the end of the untamed Verde. Below here the river flows at whatever level meets the needs

of the Salt River Project. At the dam, the Verde has sliced through 150 miles of central Arizona.

### Horseshoe Dam to the Salt River (45 miles, 5 days)

If there is enough water escaping through Horseshoe Dam, this is another good trip for novice canoeists, especially anglers. There are catfish in here big enough to swamp your boat. There are a number of four-wheel drive trails to the right which can make hunting a problem, though I've had good luck looking for quail and rabbits on both sides of the river. The upper end of Bartlett Lake can present the same mud flat problems as the upper end of Horseshoe. The fishing is just as good, maybe a bit better. You're traveling through Sonoran desert here and you are rewarded with lots of views.

Below Bartlett Dam, four-wheel drive folk have pushed paths to the river at regular intervals. There is another section just below the dam which also gets closed to land travel between January and June to protect nesting bald eagles, but, again, canoeists are not affected. Seven miles below the dam, the country flattens out and there are miles of

## OFFICIAL ENTRY FORM

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Phone: ( ) _____	Age _____ Social Security # _____
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Enclosed is my check payable to Ducks Unlimited in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Covenant Not to Sue and Waiver of Subrogation. I further agree that I will never sue Allstar Bass Tournaments, Inc., et al for damages on account of any injury or damage I suffer or cause whether known now or which may develop in the future. This does not mean that I waive my rights against Allstar Bass Tournaments, Inc., in my injury or damage is caused directly by the

negligence of a tournament official of Allstar Bass Tournaments, Inc. In the event Allstar Bass Tournaments, Inc., et al are sued because of my actions, I expressly agree to indemnify and hold Allstar Bass Tournaments, Inc., et al harmless from any liability whatsoever, including court costs and attorney's fees, arising with respect to such actions. I understand that in waiving my rights to sue Allstar Bass Tournaments, Inc., et al I am also waiving the rights of recovery from Allstar Bass Tournaments, Inc., et al of my insurance carrier for any claims they may pay on my behalf.

3. Verification of Liability Insurance. I further state that I maintain liability insurance on the boat I will use in this tournament.

4. I signify by my signature below that I have read and understand the agreements numbered 1, 2 and 3 above, and I understand the official rules.

Signature of Boater: _____	Date: _____
Signature of Partner: _____	Date: _____
Brand of Boat: _____	U.S. Coast Guard H.P. Rating: _____
Brand of Engine: _____	H.P. _____



mesquite bosques on each side of the river. The shallow water attracts lots of herons and black hawks to hunt for fish, crayfish, and toads. Lots of anglers fish this for bass, but few hunt it. Much of this land is Indian reservation and not really public anyway. Paddle this in the summer, though, and you will share the river with hordes of tubers.

About 190 miles below its place of birth, the Verde merges with the Salt River. A few short miles later, the Salt dies, too, as it is sliced up into small slivers and fed into the canals. It wasn't always this way. Not 100 years ago, 70-pound squawfish were pitchforked out of the Salt near Phoenix and used for fertilizer.

Here in Arizona, we have lost over 90 percent of our native riparian habitat. What we have left is considered some of the rarest habitat in North America. Something over 60 percent of our animals are dependent on our remaining streams. Dams and water withdrawals threaten much of what sportsmen hold dear. I write, and give slide shows, about the Verde because a river I have to share with others is better than watching the Verde share the same fate as the Salt. Stay alert and protect what we have left.

See you on the river.



(Editor's Note: Jim's book, "Verde River Recreation Guide", is published by Golden West Publishers located in Phoenix. The book sells for \$5.95 retail, or \$7.00 postpaid from either the publisher or Jim. Sportsmen with additional questions about canoeing should write to Jim Slingluff, 3080 West Monmouth Street, Tucson, Arizona 85741.

## MORE INFORMATION

**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 downriver of Childs and for road conditions.

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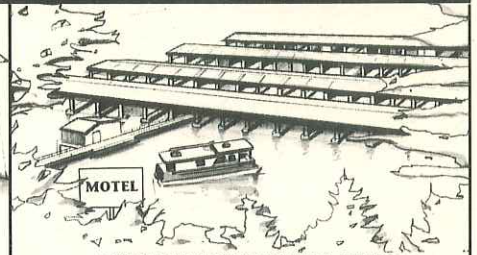
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