

Airports Where They Ain't: Outdoor Life-Dec., 1945

Land your plane in a farmer's field? If you follow Bob's simple advice, it is never a problem. He tackles the looming question of where sportsmen can land in wilderness areas, far from regulation airports, with practical and logical answers. Never one to make logical mean boring, Bob also throws in plenty of humor to add a large degree of entertainment to his informative article.

OUTDOOR
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Outdoor Life

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DECEMBER



In this issue:
**A JEEP WILL
GET YOU THERE**

RAYMOND J. BROWN, Editor

REGINALD A. HAWLEY, Art Editor

CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER 1945

One Whiff of Yukon Ram.....	JACK O'CONNOR	13
Our gun editor, fresh from another big-game hunt, is all primed to share his exciting adventures with you. Here is his first account		
Save Our Fishing Waters.....	ARTHUR GRAHAME	16
A showdown's coming in Congress. Get in the fight against pollution!		
Scarecrow Mallards.....	BERT POPOWSKI	18
The cornfields were "posted," but did those South Dakota webfeet care?		
Wake-up at Wickiup.....	JOHN GARTNER	20
Angler caught napping! But he gets his Oregon rainbow just the same		
Relax . . . and You'll Shoot Better!.....	BUD JACKSON	22
To down more birds, take the advice of Bill Miller, basketball coach		
The Mourning Dove.....	Painted by FRANCIS LEE JAGUES	24
Gray ghost of the fields, portrayed in full color by a master artist		
Game Laws versus Food Freezers.....	DON O'BRIEN	27
If you can't store all your legal take, get those regulations changed!		
The Whistler and His Bull.....	NEIL FROST	28
Never heard of calling a caribou? Well, it worked in British Columbia		
Airports Where They Ain't!.....	ROB F. SANDERSON	30
How to find a safe landing field near where you want to fish or hunt		
Five Ways to Get Your Turkey.....	TOM GILRUTH JR.	32
Mississippi hunt, full of pointers on bagging the wariest of game birds		
Be Sure Your Buck is Dead!.....	JAMES W. CONLOW	34
Don't run any risks with wounded deer; they're dynamite on the hoof!		
A Jeep Will Get You There.....		36
Top-flight photos show what this by-product of war can do for sportsmen		
This Happened to Me!.....	DON C. LEWIS JR.	44
How I learned my lesson		
Hunting Seasons for 1945-46.....		46
Open seasons for game in all states and provinces		
Arms and Ammunition.....	JACK O'CONNOR, Editor	48
Form in shotgun handling		
Angling.....	RAY BERGMAN, Editor	100
More about those leaders		
Boating.....	J. A. EMMETT, Editor	112
Buying your gear by mail		
Camping and Woodcraft.....	MAURICE H. DECKER, Editor	118
Building your own cabin		
Dogs.....	WM. CARY DUNCAN, Editor	144
Here's the setter set-up		
The Health of Your Dog.....	DR. JAMES R. KINNEY	146
Game Gimmicks.....	GUS MAGER	156
What's on Your Mind?.....		10

COVER PAINTING BY JOHN NEWTON HOWITT



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How sportsmen Airports



Sandy beaches along lakes and rivers make excellent landing strips
ILLUSTRATIONS BY STANLEY BATE

MANY sportsmen who have thought about flying to their favorite hunting grounds or fishing streams at 100 miles an hour are beginning to ask, "That sounds fine, but where can I land? If I have to leave the plane at the nearest airport to where I want to go, I might as well drive a car in the first place."

There's more than a bit of truth to this observation. Regulation airports cost money and many small towns have none. So the problem of where to land looms as a discouraging factor to the sportsman pilot unless, of course, there's water near his destination and he has an amphibian or pontoon ship. In that case all he has to do is fly down and land. But in areas where there are no sizable bodies of water, and for a lot of fellows who will be flying conventional landplanes, no such solution is at hand.

The boys who hunt in the Great Plains of the West will get along fine because much of that area is as flat as a pool table. I know some Army pilots who used to "roll their wheels" on the ground every now and then just to relieve the monotony of flying across that section of the country.

One factor is already serving to brighten the picture—government-built

airports and landing strips. The U. S. Forest Service has built several dozen of these landing areas in the most remote wilderness, for use in fire control, and they are open to sportsmen. Since the government still plans to build many more throughout the country at a cost of millions of dollars, some of them will undoubtedly be close to places you'd like to fish or hunt.

But let's assume the worst and figure out what can be done if none of these items is in your favor. This means you'll have to use your own ingenuity and judgment in finding a place to land. Planes have been and will be landed in some mighty tight spots. A lot depends upon the plane, the best type being a slow-speed trainer. These ships are not only a lot easier on your pocketbook, but a lot easier to fly than some of the winged shooting stars which will soon be on the market.

If you mention "airports" to one of the boys who were in battle areas flying the light, two-place planes known as "flying jeeps," he'll probably laugh at you. A road, a clearing, or any other little opening was all he asked. He got in and out of them—and so can you. Dare-devil stuff? Far from it. Just take the precaution of thoroughly looking over the place on which you want to land. Carefully consider such things as wind direction, slope of the ground, natural obstacles such as trees, and the nature of the surface. Make allowances for your particular plane and how heavily it is loaded. And don't forget to size up take-off possibilities, for safe landings can often be made where a take-off would be dangerous or impossible.

Many of you will be flying to the same places to which you formerly drove hour after weary hour. Having been there before, you'll know the locations of clearings, fields, and openings

and have an idea of what the ground surface is like. Frequently just the removal of a few saplings, a couple of old logs, or a rotten stump will make a good landing strip out of an abandoned field or clearing. From then on you can return by plane with the knowledge that you can set your plane down easily and safely.

Generally speaking the best places for landings can be classified in this order: farmers' fields, natural clearings in the woods, open pastures, roads, and beaches beside bodies of water.

There may be a lot of difference between two fields which look alike from the air, because slope and tilt, small gullies, and irregularities in the surface do not show up well when you're two thousand feet above the ground. In farmers' fields, the type of crop also makes a big difference.

ANY cultivated-row crop, such as corn, potatoes, or peanuts, results in a rough field. If you have to land on one, land on the wheels instead of on three points, and land and take off parallel to the rows even though this may be across the wind. I have tried it both ways—into the wind and across the rows, and crosswind parallel to the rows, using both a loaded and an empty cotton-duster plane. There is no comparison in the take-off time. Straight along the rows is best, regardless of the wind.

Pastures make excellent landing fields, but take it easy if there is livestock in the field. The noise and strangeness of your plane may cause a minor stampede, which can be particularly bad for dairy cattle. This scariness is a matter of habit, since sheep which sometimes bolt at the mere shadow of a plane flicking over the ground, at other times act very unconcerned and sophisticated at sight of one. Sheep were regularly grazed to keep down the grass on a pasture airport I once flew from in Texas, and the woolies got so accustomed to airplanes that they wouldn't even raise their heads as we took off a few feet from them.

When I was flying in the jungle regions of South America with a division of Pan American Airways, our airfields became the best pastures in the jungle, and the native stockowners saw to it that the fences did not stay in repair. As a result, we always had to buzz the field once to chase off the Brahma cattle, goats, and donkeys before circling around to land. Let me mention here an inherent disadvantage of all pastures—unless you have wheel pants or fenders over the wheels you are likely

pilots can find *Where They Aint!*

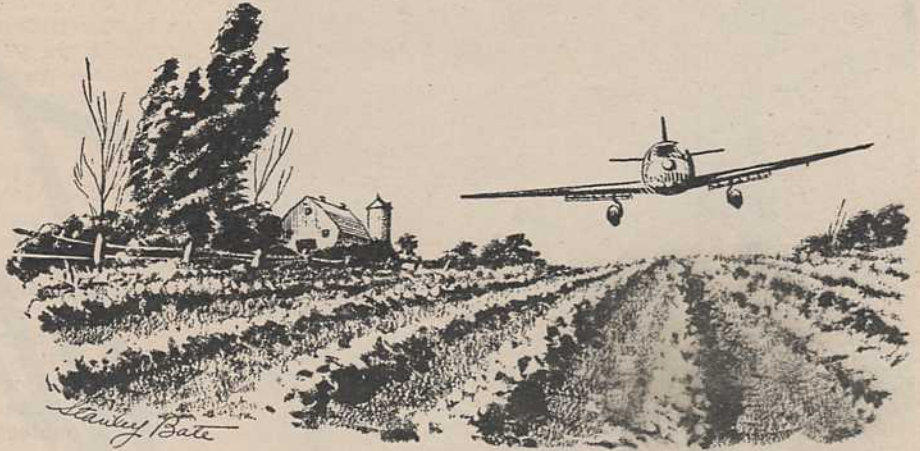
By
**ROB F.
SANDERSON**

to discover a very objectionable type of deposit on the undersides of your plane's wings.

The best type of field, next to a smooth pasture, is a hay or grain field which has recently been cut. The performance of a plane on stubble is almost as good as on a turf airport. But beware of fields with long, flexible growth, such as hay. It may curl back over the wheels, slowing the plane down considerably and holding it to the ground.

I once ran into this trouble to a limited extent when taking off from a large field of knee-high corn. I was alone in the plane and there was a good head wind, but I used the entire length of the field, paralleling the rows, before breaking ground. A pilot of my acquaintance once had power failure and ducked into an old cotton field. The dead stalks were hip-high and prevented take-off until he and a helper dragged a wooden bar up and down the field five or six times to crush down the growth and permit him to gain take-off speed.

When landing in farmers' fields use discretion so as not to harm crops. Landing on a pasture, cutover stubble or hay, or an old cornfield does no harm, but landing on partly grown or freshly seeded crops may do some damage. Also freshly seeded land is nearly always soft. I saw a forced landing on such a field, and the pilot had to taxi up and down the field ten or twelve times in order to pack ruts hard enough to take off from. Needless to say, he



Always land and take off parallel to the furrows if you have come down on a field of this type

paid the farmer for the damage done.

For one reason or another, natural clearings in the woods are found in almost all areas. I have seen these little "parks" in Western mountain valleys and in the piny woods sections of the South, and friends tell me they occur in the Northeast as well. Usually these are well sodded and long enough for a light plane. Sometimes they need a bit of ax work on a few stray saplings but on the whole they are quite clear, which leads me to believe it is the nature of the soil which causes them.

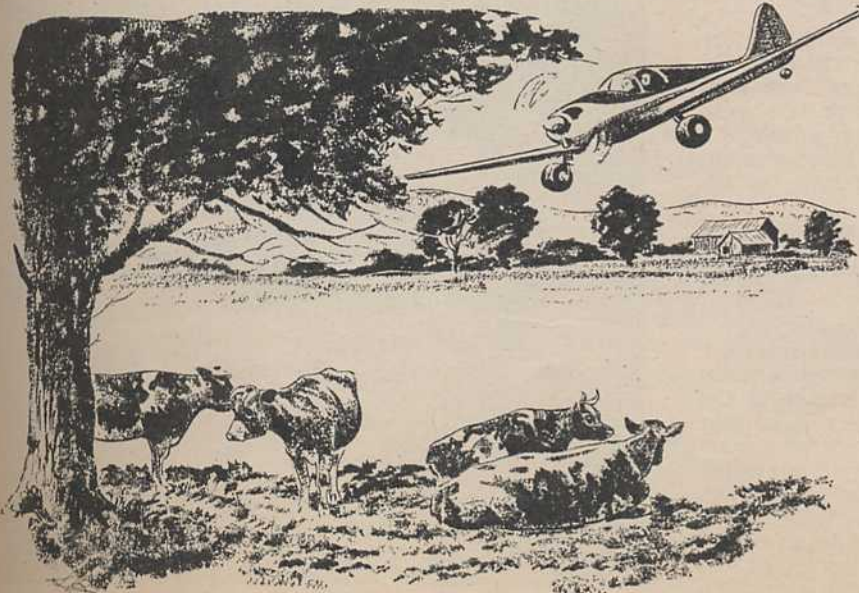
Roads have often been used in the past as makeshift landing strips. Even in backwoods areas, the little wheel tracks usually have borders twenty feet

wide on each side which are free from any growth tall enough to brush the wings, and a road ten feet wide is ample for a wheel landing. Be on the lookout for wires along roads. They are hard to see from the air and sometimes can be detected only by the presence of poles. Posts or mail boxes too, if they are close to the road, are definite hazards. Once you've landed on a road it is an easy matter to lift the tail and pull the plane into a clearing out of the way.

Along lakes, oceans, and rivers there are often wide beaches or bars on which a plane can land easily. A factor to watch here is the dampness of the soil, as this controls the hardness of the surface. Damp sand is usually hard-packed, while dry sand is often too soft for take-off. On the other hand, dry mud is as hard as a race track, whereas wet mud is worse than dry sand. A word of warning about landing on salt-water beaches—avoid them if possible, since salt will corrode your airplane. If you ever do have to sit down on one, hose your ship off with fresh water when you return.

IN ALL situations, terrain slope and wind conditions will determine where and which way to land. Airplanes whenever possible take off and land into the wind, thus permitting these maneuvers at slower ground speeds and in less distance. Naturally planes take off best downhill and land best uphill. But winds are fickle and unreasoning. Sometimes you will have to decide whether to land downhill and into the wind, or uphill and downwind. At other times there is the problem of a downhill and downwind take-off, or an up-

(Continued on page 124)



When landing in a pasture, look out for cattle. The noise of your plane may cause a stampede



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Airports

(Continued from page 31)

hill and upwind take-off. Which to choose?

There is no rule of thumb for all conditions; both the steepness of the slope and the strength and direction of the wind must be considered. Ordinarily, however, I am very skeptical of any uphill take-off or downhill landing unless there is unlimited space or a very strong favorable wind.

A spot that's O.K. for a landing may not be too good for a take-off. Suppose you land uphill into a strong wind—the best possible condition. When you leave, unless the wind changes you will be faced with either an uphill or a downwind take-off, neither of which is advisable. One airport in the Andes Mountains, which I used to visit regularly, was located at the mouth of a deep canyon, 8,000 feet above sea level. In the morning the wind blew strongly downhill. This was fine for landing, but usually we had to wait until about 10 o'clock, when the wind subsided, before we could make a safe downhill take-off.

Thus, owing to differences in wind conditions, there may be days when your pet landing spots may be used safely and other days when different winds render them unusable. And there are some areas, wide and clear, that may always be dangerous. Always avoid a field with a bad dip in the center; a ridge in the middle is not nearly so bad.

I recall one occasion when we'd been in the air for several hours over hilly country, and my companion wanted to land for a rest. Selecting a spot, I glided in and noticed, too late, that the field was deeply cup-shaped. On the take-off we acquired speed quickly on the downhill run, but just as we got flying speed we reached the upslope, with a grade that was about as steep as our rate of climb. We were headed straight for a farmhouse which stood on the lowest point on the ridge.

The farmer, his wife, and about nine children, lined up according to size, were standing out in front to watch our take-off. Over the top of the engine cowling I saw them turn and run for cover behind the house. I pulled the stick back, and we lifted just enough to miss the clothesline by a wish. Then I had to feed in right rudder to miss the barn.

We picked up plenty of speed going down the valley on the other side and flew safely out, but I noticed my companion craning out the window to see if there was any laundry on our landing gear.

Such an experience proves the value of carefully inspecting a strange field by making a complete circle around it. You may discover wires and other obstructions otherwise invisible. If you have not landed there before it is conservative practice to fly over it at about ten feet to inspect the surface closely. This is known as "dragging" the field.

Wheel landings are often better than three-pointers. In a three-point landing the nose comes up and cuts off straight-ahead vision just before you touch the ground, whereas in a wheel landing this vision is retained past the point of ground contact and you can see any unexpected obstacles. Also, in tail-up position it is much easier and safer to give it the gun and fly out at the last minute, if you don't like the looks of things.

Most of the time the wind will be neither head nor tail but quartering



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from one side or the other, sometimes a square crosswind. Crosswind landings and take-offs are not difficult when proper correction is made. The object is to land the ship while going straight ahead with no side drift over the ground. If you hit the ground while drifting a poor landing will result and the ship will be difficult to control.

This correction in the glide is easily made by putting the upwind wing down gradually until you see all drift has stopped. The plane is easily straightened out just before hitting the ground. On the ground the ship will tend to "weather-cock" into the wind but giving it a little downwind rudder, perhaps a little brake, too, will keep it straight.

Crosswind take-offs require the reverse of this technique and are simpler. Mastery of crosswind conditions is necessary if you expect to use a lot of poorly located fields and it is a good idea to practice this around the home airport.

Obstructions, such as tall trees at the end of the landing strip, are another hazard. It is easier to descend over these when landing than to climb out over them when taking off. Two simple maneuvers—the forward slip and the side slip—enable you to descend quickly over obstructions with no increase in speed and to land safely, but there is no shortcut for gaining altitude on take-off. Slips are easy to do and can be taught in twenty minutes by a competent flight instructor.

Never attempt a landing until you have first ascertained the wind direction. At airports this is shown by a wind sock or wind T, but in backwoods spots you will have to judge by the way the trees bend or the leaves flutter, by the direction of smoke, road dust, drifting snow, or other sign. Cloud shadows usually are reliable wind-direction indicators, although winds at altitudes often differ from surface winds to some extent.

Before leaving on a trip be sure you have checked the weather prospects. It is an easy thing to do at any fair-size airport. It doesn't cost a thing and it's always a good idea to listen carefully to what the forecaster has to say before you take off.

Once you are used to this "barnstorming" sort of flying, you'll find it great sport and much more interesting than landing at a regular airport. As for objections by property owners about your landing, hunting, or fishing on their property, it's surprising how a free plane ride will "fix things up" so that you'll be a welcome guest ever after!

NEXT MONTH: A veteran sportsman flyer will take you with him in a light plane to a remote lake in the north country where there is fishing of a kind rarely found.

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MICHIGAN'S latest grant from Pittman-Robertson funds—the money accumulated through federal taxes on sporting arms and ammunition and apportioned to the states on the basis of area and game-license purchases—was \$51,202, the highest of any state. Texas came second, with New York, Pennsylvania, and California following in that order.

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