

1941 13

# Outdoor Life

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In this Issue:  
**"MIXED  
BAG  
in the  
YUKON"**

FEBRUARY



RAYMOND J. BROWN, Editor

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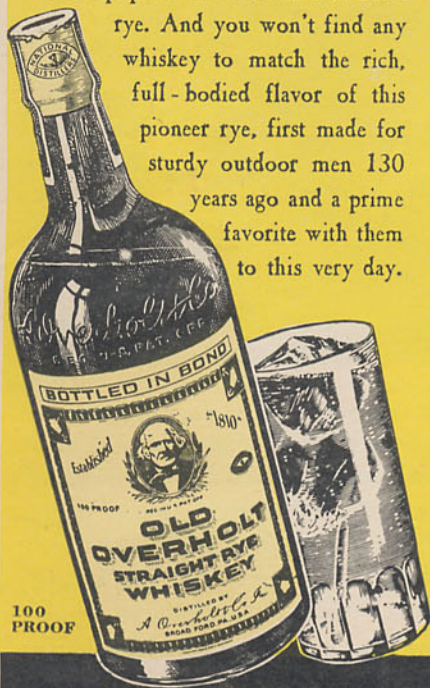
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The beginning of a strange rabbit hunt. The hounds wait puzzled but patient while Tom attaches his motor to the stern



# Boating for Bunnies

By ROB F. SANDERSON



Weary of one-rabbit islands, Tom wonders if there may be a cottontail harem on the next

**D**ID YOU EVER hear of two hunters starting out on a rabbit hunt in a boat? That's just what Tom and I did one day.

The weather was very mild for late autumn in Wisconsin; the big river was low and clear and there was no ice. The ducks were all gone south save a few laggards. The season for upland birds and squirrels was done.

"Let's go hunting tomorrow," Tom suggested to me one night.

"Hunting for what—passenger pigeons?" Everyone knew the game had been shot off slick owing to the fine hunting weather.

"Hunting for rabbits."

I thought it over a minute or two, as

I knew the chances of our getting some shooting were pretty slim. Then I remembered that my wife had been at me all week to rake the lawn, and I reflected that the snow was long overdue. If I could stall her off another week-end it might snow enough to cover the lawn. I decided to go along.

I picked up Tom at 8 o'clock the next morning. After we had pulled the dogs out of the car seat twice, and got them both in the trunk at once on the third try, Tom astonished me by asking me to drive down to the river. That didn't quite make sense.

"I don't like to seem impertinent, Commodore," I said when we had taken our places in Tom's boat. "But would

you kindly give the crew a hint of where we're going?"

"The sand islands."

The sand islands! We'd hunted ducks and geese there together, but I'd never thought about rabbits. It looked like a good idea. There's a lot of willow and scrub-brush cover on those islands, and there might be cottontails on them too.

The islands string out one after the other for miles down the river. Sometimes there are three or four abreast, with sloughs in between. The river current is swift and dangerous, and eats away or builds up the islands in an astonishing way. First there is a sand bar, then some willows take hold, and in a couple of years you notice an island there. In a few seasons it may be washed away, or it may stay and grow to a couple of hundred acres.

**T**OM cut the outboard just above a big island, and we poled and grunted until we pushed close enough to vault to shore on an oar. Then we hauled the boat up on the sand. The dogs beat it down the sand for the nearest willows.

"We'll soon know if there are any rabbits," I forecast, draping my game bag across my shoulders and loading the gun.

We took about twenty steps toward the cover when the old dog let out a war whoop and pulled out the throttle. About fifty yards away, a big cottontail bounced out of the willows to run across the open sand to a bigger and better thicket.

"What did I tell you!" yelled Tom triumphantly.

When we got to the second thicket, the rabbit had reached a third and still larger one. This was bristling with scrub thorn trees, so the attacking force resorted to a blockade. We could hear the cries of the hounds growing fainter. Suddenly they ceased sounding.

"They've holed him," I ventured.

"Wait a minute. If you stay here, and



A hunter can wade the shallow sloughs between the willow-grown islands and sand bars, but dogs must swim. The water's chilly either way!

## ROBINSON CRUSOE RABBITS COME ONE TO AN ISLAND, BUT THEY FILL YOUR GAME POCKET NICELY AT A DAY'S END

keep quiet, the dogs and I will drive one back to you."

I waited on one foot and then on the other. Then I drew designs in the sand with my gunstock. About five minutes went by, and I was watching a soaring duck hawk that I hoped would pass close enough for a chance shot.

Then the dogs jumped again. Their yodeling grew louder, heading straight toward me. I slipped off the safety catch and forgot about the duck hawk. Br'er Rabbit wasn't apt to turn when running that fast; and he ought to break cover any minute now.

Then I saw him. The willows were thin and he was clipping along at top speed. Raising my gun and tensing my right hand, I started to come down on him, but there was a hound escort a couple of feet behind on each side. In a split second I decided Tom would be less disturbed if I passed up the shot than if I tickled the dogs. By this time the rabbit was in the next thicket with the hounds whooping at his rear.

TOM came running around the edge of the thicket at top speed. "Why didn't you shoot?" he panted.

"I didn't see anything," I replied. The barking reached the opposite shore of the island and stopped abruptly.

"Holed!" Tom concluded.

"I'll get the dogs," I volunteered.

I started off across the sand toward where the dogs had stopped baying. Looking back over my shoulder, I saw Tom walking slowly back and forth searching intently for rabbit tracks.

I reached the river bank in a couple of minutes. The dogs were splashing in the cold water about twenty feet down-

stream, putting the last embellishing teeth marks on a very wet cottontail that was still half in the water.

"Nice doggies," I coaxed, as I pulled the rabbit away from them. As I stepped slowly back up the bank, trying to hold the dead rabbit clear, my right foot suddenly fell away from under me and I dropped about six inches.

I had stepped into a muskrat den. Apparently the rabbit knew this den, but had stayed away from it so long that falling sod had blocked the entrance. This no doubt caused him great embarrassment when he ran down the bank two feet ahead of the hounds. I concluded that he had taken to water as a last resort and the dogs had retrieved him alive.

Having solved the mystery, I hurried back to Tom. He was standing looking toward me, feet spread firmly, with his gunstock solidly planted in between. A sixth sense told me he had found the rabbit tracks. As I walked toward him, he began to scrutinize the rabbit carefully; and then I remembered the animal was wet and slipped it into my game sack where he wouldn't see the matted fur.

"How'd you get that?" he asked, looking at me as if I was a carnival magician. "I didn't hear you shoot."

"Oh, I had it in my pocket all along," I told him, and kept on walking. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw him look vaguely in the direction where he might have found rabbit tracks.

WE HUNTED the thickets one on each side, with the dogs working the middle. This system was intended to get the rabbits soon after they jumped.

Most of the thicket patches were separated by open lanes; and if you ran hard in the direction the dogs chased a rabbit, it was likely that either you or the man on the other side would get a shot when the cottontail broke cover and crossed to the next brush clump.

But we hiked all the way down to the end of the island without seeing one more rabbit. It was a sunny day; walking in the loose sand was hard, and we became warm. We sat down on a cottonwood log at the end of the island.

"Well," I began, "how about walking back to the boat?"

TOM ignored my suggestion. "Funny thing. Good cover all over. Where there's an old one there should be some young ones."

"But I brought my rabbit along in my pocket," I corrected.

Tom was not looking at me, but beyond me and down the river. I turned around, and across a series of sand bars and sloughs I could see another island. "How about trying the next island?" he suggested.

"How'll we try it? I mean, how'll we get there?"

"Wade."

"But it's almost winter!" I protested. "And maybe the water's too deep."

"The cattle seem to make it. They wouldn't swim in this weather." Sure enough, where he pointed I could make out a faint path across the sand bars, made by the hardy scrub cattle that graze the islands.

"Well, you go first."

Tom carefully rolled his pants up his long legs, walked over the sand to the water, and strode in. As his legs hit the water, I imagined I could almost see them turn color.

He crossed the first slough with a few inches to spare between the water and his rolled pants. On the next bar he picked up a seasoned stick to aid his balance. By the time he reached the third bar he (Continued on page 80)

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## Boating for Bunnies

(Continued from page 25)

was a small, distant figure, and a few minutes later I could see him waving to me from the island.

With bared legs and much resolution I started after him. It really wasn't so bad after the first shock. My legs were soon numb and I couldn't feel much except a slight burning sensation.

When I arrived, Tom was all dressed and warm again, ready to enjoy my discomfort at landing. The dogs had swum across behind me, and were now rolling in the sand and whining with the cold.

"Cold?" he grinned.  
"No. I f-feel f-fine," I assured him, trying to keep my teeth from chattering.

He started to say something else, but just then the dogs began to holler, so he grabbed his gun and left me wiping wet sand from between my toes with a wool sock. When I finished replacing my foot-gear, I hurried down the island toward the dogs. I had barely reached good cover when I heard a shot closely followed by another. I walked down to meet Tom just as he emerged from a thicket with a fat buck rabbit.

"THIS is better than carrying them all the way in your pocket," he smirked. "Let's go."

We started off at a fast walk. The cover was not densely concentrated, and there was a fine chance of getting a jump shot if there were any rabbits bedded down. And we felt confident that the young buck would have little mates somewhere.

... That's what we thought. But we walked the entire length of the island, which was about half as long as the first one, without taking our guns off safety. Tom and I met at the narrow extremity.

"A rabbit to an island," I commented. "Regular Robinson Crusoe stuff."

"Maybe this is the end of the hermits," Tom said hopefully. "Maybe there's a harem on the next island."

"Why don't you go over and see?"

Tom shot me a dirty look, while I sat on a log and took off my game bag, then he started off. This time the hounds went with him instead of waiting with me. It was midday now, and the sun was warm. I lay down on my back and watched, for the next ten minutes, a slow wind herding a few very white clouds across the sky.

It never occurred to me to take my boots off until I heard the dogs yelping in the distance. Then I pulled them off as fast as I could and lit out down the sand bar for the water. Two thirds of the distance to the island I heard a shot.

When I reached the shore, I did not bother to wipe the sand off my feet, but pulled on socks and boots and started running down the island. I had just barged into a clearing which ran almost from side to side of the narrow island when I saw a rabbit coming toward the clearing down a narrow strip of brush. He was bouncing right along, so I ducked back into the cover and ran over to intercept him.

For a couple of minutes I waited, but no rabbit. The dogs were yipping merrily in the other direction, indicating they were on another rabbit. Thinking my bunny had set, I walked slowly forward.

He had set, and he bounced up some distance ahead of me. I got in a long

shot, but the brush was thick and I couldn't be sure I had plugged him. Running forward, I could see him slipping along, although he was wounded. I shot again, and picked him up only three feet from the back door of a muskrat burrow.

The dogs still whooped it up at the far end of the island. Keeping a careful eye on the edges of the clearing as I trotted along, I headed for the sound. At the top of a little ridge I spied something gray coming toward me. In a minute I got a good look, and saw it was a cottontail.

Dodging into a gully, I ran toward the rabbit in a crouch so there would be no chance of his seeing me. But I must have made too much noise, for when I came over a low ridge he was running the other way down another gully. By this time I was puffing heavily and missed my first shot, but the second crippled his hind legs. I knocked him on the head and started for the dogs.

Soon I heard a shot and the dogs stopped howling. I walked forward, and arrived in time to find Tom picking up a big rabbit at the edge of a small patch.

"Let's take a turn back," said Tom. "I know there are more rabbits here."

"You mean there were," I said. "I'm sorry, but I can't hunt any more."

"Why?"  
"I got my limit." The limit was three.

"Well, then, let's go home. I've got my limit too."

Going back, we waded to the shore and walked up the mainland. This caused less shoe-changing than following the islands. By the time we had hiked back to the point opposite where the boat was, it was almost sundown. The river had risen slightly and the boat was floating at anchor off the island. The water in between was too deep to wade without shedding pants and shorts.

"I'll go," I volunteered. "I'll bring the boat back."

The icy water was almost waist deep midway. So when I reached the bar I was numb again and didn't mind treading on the angular pebbles. Then I rowed back to the mainland to collect Tom, the dogs and guns, and the six rabbits.

When we pushed off upriver again to the car, the sun had sunk and the water was shadowed black in the dusk. Tom was loosening the vent on the motor tank when he spoke.

"How did you really get that first rabbit?" he asked.

"I've been kidding you," I confessed. "I didn't have him in my pocket—I had him in my hat all the time!"

## Bull Snakes Help Ranchman

BULL snakes are helping W. A. Richardson, district clerk of Erath County, Tex., to rid his ranch of rattlesnakes. On purchasing the property, Richardson advertised for bull snakes, bought 14, and released them thereon. Since then the number of rattlers has diminished, and the ranchman has learned why.

Recently, while walking through a field, he saw a large bull snake attack a rattlesnake and, after a struggle, constrict the rattler until it was dead. After killing the rattler, the bull snake seized it in his mouth and swallowed it.