

# Outdoor Life

OCTOBER

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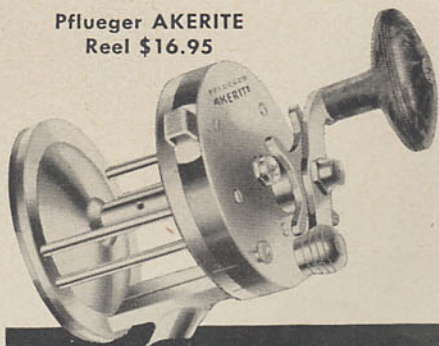
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IN THIS ISSUE OF

# Outdoor Life

Outdoor Recreation

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VOLUME 104

★ OCTOBER, 1949 ★

NUMBER 4

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KEITH  
WARD

FACT-FINDING HUNTER TAKES

*BUSH FLIGHT FOR*  
**MOOSE**

ILLUSTRATION BY  
KEITH WARD





Here's the two-place Luscombe seaplane I flew from Wisconsin to the Ontario wilds and back. In case of mishap, we figured our vivid paint job would make it easy to trace us!



PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

For wilderness hunting, is flying in the way to travel, or will too many planes spoil it all? This experienced sportsman-pilot took just such a trip, to determine its advantages and drawbacks. One thing is sure: using a plane brings the hunter a brand-new set of problems

by **ROB F. SANDERSON**

Like almost every other American who flew during the war, I hankered to pilot a private plane to some wilderness hunting area. So last fall my brother Tom and I decided to attempt such a trip in a two-place, 85-horsepower Luscombe seaplane.

Because of its many wilderness lakes, and the fact that Canada moose are found in fair numbers in certain isolated spots, the province of Ontario was chosen.

The hunting season began October 1 in the district north of the east-west Canadian National Railway tracks, and since most of this area was inaccessible by auto, it was ideal for plane



## BUSH FLIGHT (continued)

transportation. However, we soon realized the difficulty of operating with the airplane alone. We couldn't count on getting high-octane gasoline most anywhere, so we would have to haul it in. Then too, we wanted to have some spare equipment along, and there was also the problem of bringing out our game.

For this reason we decided that my brother Tom would drive north in a car and trailer while I took the plane from our Wisconsin home. On the off chance that the airplane would prove impractical after we reached our base of operations, Tom carried a complete outboard-powered canoe outfit, but I'm happy to report that it never touched the water.

Several people had advised us that in their opinion the plane was too small for the amount of equipment to be carried, but after weighing each item I decided that the trip could be successfully flown if only absolute essentials were taken.

### After Tests, the Take-off

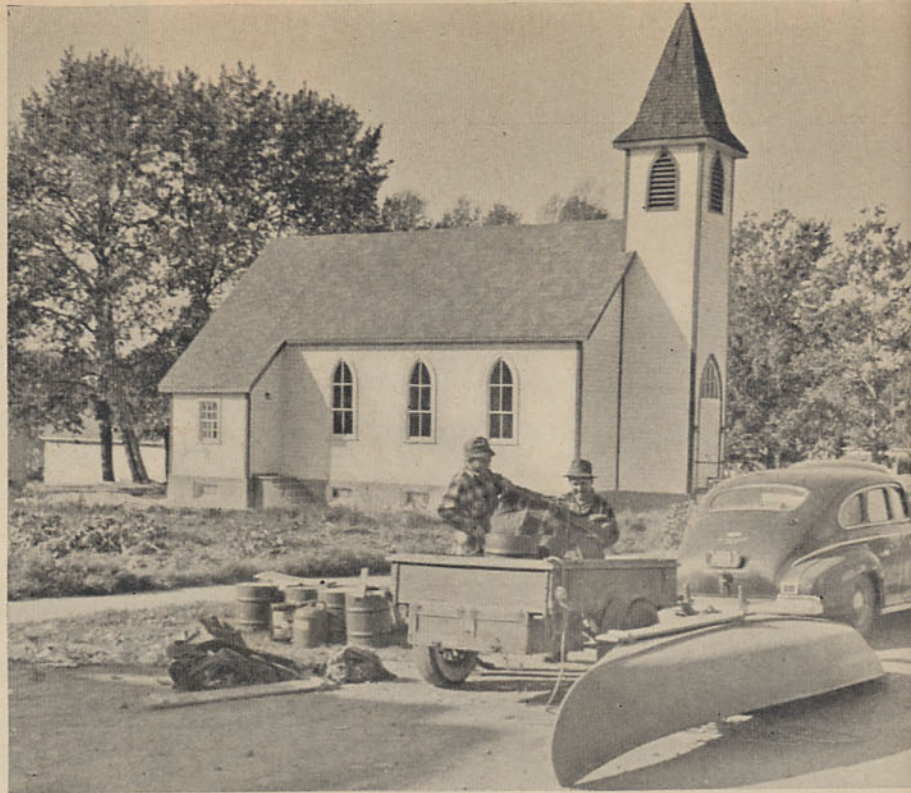
Every effort was made to save weight and space. The seat cushions were removed and our sleeping bags substituted for upholstery. Finally, after trial tests for take-off performance (the factor most liable to give trouble), I was satisfied that the little ship would do the job.

Tom picked up ten drums of aviation gas in Fort William (on Lake Superior, just across the Minnesota border), loaded them in the trailer, and proceeded north to join me at a hotel in Nipigon, where I had landed and moored the ship. The next day we repacked his heavy outfit to make the trailer ride better. By now we had decided that Geraldton, a mining town on the Trans-Canada Highway to the northeast of Nipigon, would serve as a good headquarters base. Geraldton was about as close as Tom could get with the car and trailer to the open-season country, which lay about thirty miles still farther north.

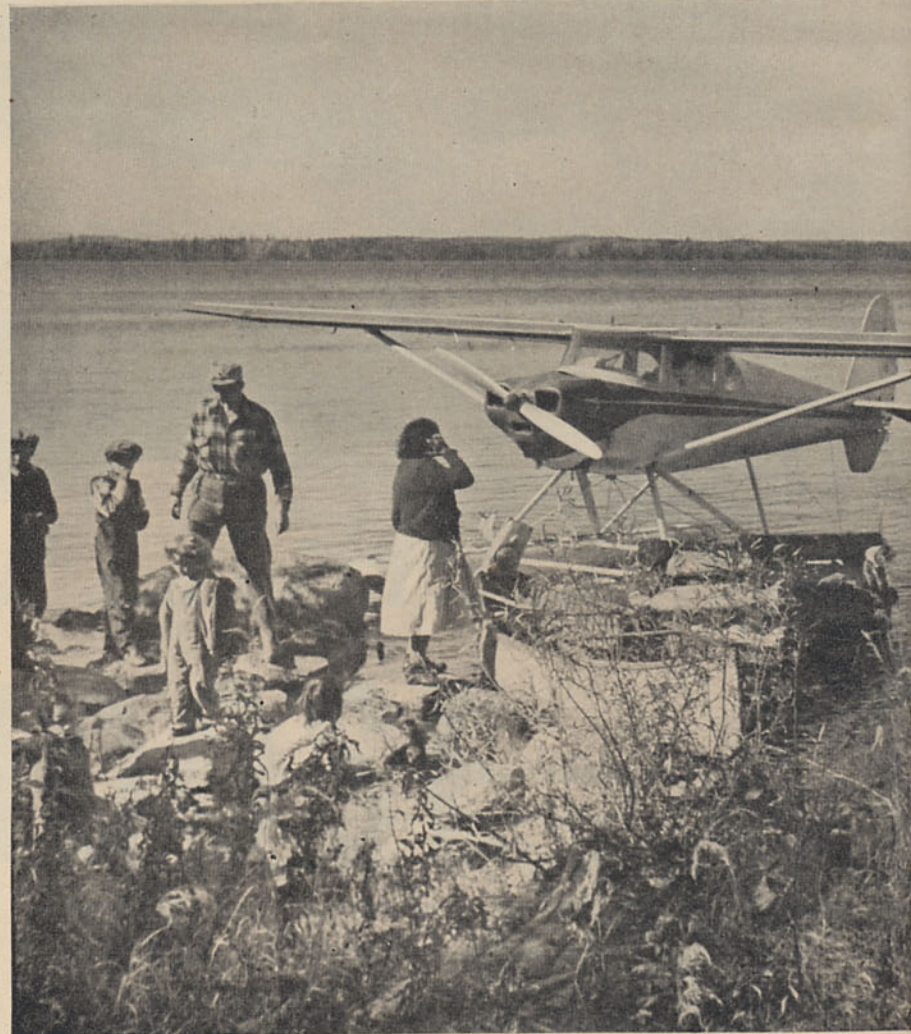
The flying weather was clear and the air bumpy. For two days we flew around the wilderness north of the C.N.R. tracks, to narrow the field to our actual hunting grounds. On some of our reconnaissance trips we flew 400 miles. At the end of the second day we decided on the headwaters of the Squaw River, where there was a group of mostly nameless lakes of the small, boggy type preferred by moose.

There is a certain amount of risk involved in flying in trackless bush area. There are two great dangers: being forced down by motor failure, or seriously damaging your pontoons on rocks hidden beneath unfamiliar waters. We always tried to keep someone informed of the area we were working, but this was not always possible. Even so, we concluded that in case of difficulties it would be too arduous and risky to attempt walking out. Instead, we proposed to stay with the ship (which was painted a conspicuous color) and await rescuers.

For this reason we carried carefully selected emergency equipment, includ-



**1** After flying to Nipigon, Ontario, I met my brother Tom, who'd driven up by car, and helped him reload the trailer. Note the drums of aviation gasoline; also the canoe, brought along just in case we needed it. (We didn't!)



**4** Spotting the only habitation for miles around, we came down to get dope on hunting prospects. John Rich, a Scotch-Indian, and his family obliged





**2** Paddling out to the moored plane at Nipigon for my hop to Geraldton, Ont.



**3** From Geraldton, where Tom left car and trailer, we prospected for likely moose country. Here the Ogoki River shows beneath the wing of the plane



**5** John's two-way radio, which he uses to call for a plane when he wants to ship out a load of fish. (Of course, the Riches also listen in a lot, to keep in touch with what goes on!) Tom's tuning in to get the weather report



**6** We decided to hunt the upper Squaw. Back at our base, Tom unloaded the battery (to save weight) and we took off



## BUSH FLIGHT (continued)

ing waterproof matches, ax, Swedish bucksaw, rope, snare wire, small gill net, lightweight fishing outfit, pocket compasses, cook kit, and enough dehydrated food to last us five days. This, of course, was in addition to sleeping bags, small tarpaulin, two-man tent, maps, warm clothes, and two rifles—Tom's .30/06 and my own .348 Winchester.

This was not the snuggest outfit imaginable, but after a few hours of observing the bush from the air we resolved that if we were ever forced down and help was not forthcoming, we would try to hold out until the freeze-up and go out over the ice.

Actually, we fared very well. The most practical method of hunting is to camp right near the hunting grounds, and not to try to commute daily from base camp in the plane. This is because poor flying weather is usually the best hunting weather and there is little advantage to being grounded miles away from the place where the opportunities for a trophy head are greatest.

Accordingly, we camped on a low birch knoll on a boggy lake. After half a day in the dense woods, which showed a fair sprinkling of fresh sign, we agreed that the bush in the immediate vicinity was too noisy for hunting and transferred our operations to a burned-over area several miles distant. Not only was the visibility better here, and our chance of seeing moose better, but sign was more plentiful.

The next morning about 8:30 a.m. I sighted a cow moose in the water, feeding, across a small lake. Careful watching showed a bull lurking in the alders behind her, but because of the brush it was impossible to determine just how large his rack was. Since the animals were downwind, Tom and I had to circle the lake and come in from the other side. This took us about an hour and a half, and when we got there the animals were nowhere in sight.

### Down for the Count!

However, by remaining quiet and waiting we heard a movement and later saw the big bull himself. I remember noticing his rack, but in the excitement of the moment I did not realize how unusually large it was.

Tom and I opened fire almost simultaneously. At the first hit the bull staggered and weaved out into the water but kept on going. A count of cartridges later showed that seven shots were fired. Five of them scored—three high in the shoulder and back—and the bull fell twice before he stayed down for the count.

He was too large to be moved to shore, so we had to dress him out in the water. It took us all the rest of the day, and was a job for the Hercules twins, for the bottom was soft and mucky.

Since the lake on which we shot the moose was too small to set the plane down on, and land travel was too rough and obstructed with giant windfalls, Tom had a bright idea. With the saw we cut several dead pines from the edge of the burn and nailed them to-



**7** We set down on a boggy-shored lake that looked "moosy," moored the ship, and prepared to camp. Looks as if Tom was doing all the work!



**10** At 8:30 the following morning, from just such a spot as this, I saw a cow moose feeding at the far edge of a lake, and a bull half concealed behind her. We circled clear around, came in from the other side





**8** Chow! We'd looked around for moose—and seen sign—but the woods were too dense, and noisy underfoot



**9** Next day we flew to a lake near a burn where the hunting would be more in the open. But first, a spot of tea



**11** We emerged to the right of those tall pines—and the animals were nowhere to be seen! But we kept quiet, the bull soon showed, and we opened fire almost simultaneously. The bull staggered, weaved out into the water. I switched to my camera and caught Tom, a portsider, getting in the last of seven shots



## BUSH FLIGHT (continued)

gether to form a crude raft. Then, while Tom poled two of the moose quarters (all he dared load aboard the raft) down a creek that led to a larger lake, I hoofed it overland, got the plane, and met him there.

However, the weather suddenly turned sour, and the ceiling was so low and the drizzle so bad that it was all we could do to fly back to headquarters after taking on that first load of meat. After that we worried for fear the rest of the meat would spoil, for we were grounded for two and a half days before the weather broke and we got in to take it—and those mighty antlers—out.

We flew the meat to a locker plant at Geraldton to be quick-frozen. Then we wrapped it in canvas and moved it by trailer to a freezer in Port Arthur, just above Fort William. That way we had no trouble in keeping it from thawing during the trip to Port Arthur, and from Port Arthur home.

It happens that my brother and I had previously made canoe trips into Ontario for moose—maybe you remember reading my accounts of them in earlier issues of *OUTDOOR LIFE*—so we were in a position to judge as to the relative merits of the two modes of travel, as far as the hunter is concerned.

### Canoe and Airplane Compared

Briefly, we had long since decided that when your jumping-off place is some point on the railroad tracks, there's not much percentage in hunting too near them, because most sportsmen do just that. (This isn't just a notion; one year I actually checked results along a popular stretch of tracks, and the report was that not a single moose was taken in that area.) So with a canoe, your cue is to get back far enough so you'll have the place all to yourself—and that means lots of carries! On top of that, if you do get your moose, it will be tougher than ever to negotiate those portages on the trip back. But that's the way it is.

As I see it, the second great handicap is that you've got to pick your spot almost blindly, and gamble that it will prove out; for when you figure the time it takes to paddle in and scout around, there won't be many days left in which to look for greener pastures.

I realize that there are compensations; a wilderness canoe trip is in a class by itself, and as far as I'm concerned nothing can ever quite take the place—when rounding the point of a lake or the bend of a stream—of the sudden lurch of the canoe that is Tom's silent signal meaning he has sighted game!

The plane, of course, is something else again, and it proved priceless to us in covering wilderness distance on our successful trip last fall. It took us only a matter of days to prospect for game over more country than we could have covered by canoe in a whole summer; in fact, much of it couldn't even be reached by canoe. However, as if to offset the plane's advantages there were numerous added responsibilities on the other side of the ledger.

Besides the ever-present danger of



**12** Now the work began! Even with a rope tied to one hock, it was all we could do to pull—and pry—that hefty brute a bit closer to shore



**13** At last we got him into shallow water. I took an ax to the chest, propped it open with a stick, and let Tom take over the dressing out



going down in the bush, many other considerations required mental if not physical attention. The gasoline supply had to be arranged for, and provision made for maintenance and possible emergency repairs. Many of the lakes have such rocky borders that we found rubber hip boots indispensable in handling the plane alongshore, and it was very difficult work at best. Then too, in some areas the lakes and rivers are full of floating pulpwood which has broken loose from rafts and constitutes a potential menace to any ship landing or taking off. Fall weather is so unpredictable that you may have to ground your ship unexpectedly, thus losing valuable hunting days just when you are planning to go somewhere.

Tom and I had a tendency to travel altogether too far afield. It's well to hunt within reach of the railroad tracks (but not *too* near!), so that you can walk out safely if need be. And besides, that makes for quicker commuting in case you run short of supplies or have to ferry meat out in two or three installments.

### Unexpected Complications

There are still vast areas of Ontario which are seldom if ever hunted, and many are accessible only from the air. The problem is to gear such a trip to the plane, and this is likely to involve unlooked-for complications.

For instance, my home is only five hours' flying time from where we hunted. However, arriving in Port Arthur on the homeward journey just before noon on a Saturday, it took me some little while to locate the Canadian customs and immigration men, and by the time I got cleared, it was too late to make Duluth, Minn., and the U. S. customs. Meantime I learned that the U. S. customs officials charge fantastic overtime rates for Sunday work and that if I crossed then, clearance papers might cost me sixty dollars.

Therefore I waited over until Monday, and arrived home that afternoon to discover that Tom, driving the car and leaving our camp Saturday morning, had arrived home Sunday night.

An airplane, then, will solve practically all your current problems but will give you a new set in their stead. For example, moose in the water are often sighted from the air. However, moose prefer small, shallow lakes and boggy streams. Chances are you'll have to land on some larger lake, and by the time you reach your moose he may be gone.

Even if not, and you are successful in shooting him after a careful stalk, there is the problem of getting him out. Our bull was estimated at 1,600 pounds by the man who butchered him, and I am convinced that Tom and I could never have back-packed those moose quarters to the ship over terrain where a creature half chimpanzee and half ferret would have found tough going.

When it comes to shooting moose from the air, that's a feat for Annie Oakley in a helicopter. In other words, it can't be done. But if he's willing to bush it, the airplane can do lots for the sportsman-pilot.

THE END



**14** Carcass was quartered, but too heavy to tote out. What to do? Why, build a raft and float the meat to where the plane could be brought!



**15** Tom started to pole two of the quarters (all the raft would take at a time) to our rendezvous. Then I hoofed overland to get the plane



**16** Success! That 63-inch rack cut our speed ten miles an hour, but so what? It was among the best Ontario moose trophies on record!