

# Outdoor Life

1949  
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*Sanderson*



*woods*



# MAKE FISHING TIME



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Outdoor Recreation

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NUMBER 1

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### COVER PAINTING BY WOODI

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Overoptimism is a sure road to disappointment. Shake salt liberally on glowing reports of new country

# MAKE YOUR OWN LUCK

Was that trip a bust? It's easy to put the blame on fickle fortune, but most of the time success is a matter of planning and preparation

by *ROB F. SANDERSON*

Whether lucky or unlucky, trips into the great outdoors seldom turn out as planned. The variables of weather, the whims of game or fish, the peculiarities of local conditions, and the individualities of the sportsmen are mixed to form the thing commonly known as "luck," which is supposed to write the final chapter to the trip.

To my knowledge, no survey has ever been made to find out what percentage of sporting trips are "unlucky" from the standpoint of tangible results in game or fish, and why. I decided to go over all my past hunting trips that lasted from several days to several weeks—trips which are for the most part detailed in notes—to discover what proportion of the trips fell far enough below expectations to be called failures. I wanted to test a growing suspicion that perhaps the errors and mistakes in all trips fall into repeat categories which can be avoided or compensated for in the future. In other words, I wanted to find out to what extent we can control our luck if we really try.

Analysis of trips numbering into the dozens—hunting, fishing, and trapping in the States, Mexico, and Canada—yielded surprising results. Three important facts emerge. First, very few



trips fail completely. Only two of those I examined drew a blank—my first moose hunt and a spur-of-the-moment deer hunt in central Texas. Second, we sportsmen have more command of our trips than fickle fortune herself. All trips contained errors which, although not substantial enough to ensure failure, did detract from the trip. Thirdly, and most annoyingly, these mistakes all fell into certain patterns which I and my pals had been repeating for years under different circumstances.

These mistakes practically all fell into nine categories:

1. *Overoptimism on new country.* The unknown holds a challenge for all of us. Though we shake salt liberally on glowing reports from strangers—or even from friends—we are more liable to get burned on new hunting grounds than anywhere else. My journal shows the only complete “busts” occurred in strange country, when we were not accompanied by an old hand who had been successful there previously.

This Rover Boys Going Off Alone Into the Unknown is great stuff for the imagination, but it doesn't put meat in the pot. Unless I am willing to chalk the first trip up to experience, I no longer venture into Indian Country without a partner who has been there and brought home scalps. My successful trips into terra incognita have usually been made with an experienced partner to teach me the local ABC's.

2. *Failure to test each and every item of equipment.* This is a perennial source of trouble. While everyone agrees with the basic soundness of this idea, few follow it. For one thing, we are usually

extremely rushed not only in preparation, for the trip, but in winding up our business affairs for a couple of weeks. The commonest excuse is, “It worked O.K. last year.” From this folly I recall a whole history of minor catastrophes.

#### Check Outboard, Stove, and Gun!

In 1938 I ate cold food for seven days on the fuel-barren Sonora desert of Mexico because the tank of my partner's “unfailing” gasoline camp stove would not hold air pressure. In 1946 I was temporarily marooned on an island in James Bay, Canada, because an outboard motor which had functioned perfectly for six years, with the sole aid of new spark plugs and a point file, finally rusted a water-pump spring. The only way I know to avoid this sort of trouble is to take a local week-end outing in advance and try out *everything* you plan to use on the trip. And in the matter of sighting in guns, the ghost of a lost venison steak tells me that this is not enough, but that a little lock on the gun case will hold the right adjustment against prying hands.

3. *Trying to bite off too much.* Unless time is unlimited, it is far better to settle down in one locale and cover it well than to try sandwiching a goose hunt, a moose hunt, and a wild-boar hunt into two weeks. In the latter case, too much time goes into travel, and just when you are settled and ready to do business, it's moving time.

4. *Arriving too late, or otherwise miscalculating time.* A certain amount of time is lost getting located in any game country, and since the first couple of days of the season are often best, it is better to take time out in advance and get lined up. A day or two spent locating runways and stands for big game, or building blinds for waterfowl, is the best possible success insurance. A year ago I bagged my moose solely on circumstances developing from a comfortable, pre-season arrival. Unless you have an experience-tested man on the ground to do this pre-season work for you, it is best to be there in advance and in person.

5. *Too large a party.* Somehow it is ten times harder to recruit the first one or two partners to a trip than the next dozen. Hunting parties, once started, have a way of snowballing. Except in special circumstances such as deer driving or pheasant driving in the Dakotas, a party of more than four men may be a handicap. In large parties, half are inclined to stand around in the way of the half who are doing the work. Accommodations are harder to find for large numbers, and there are too many divergent opinions on everything.

If a party gets too large, sometimes it can be divided into two independent groups. The most adaptable size is two men, for they can make an immediate decision or a quick change of plan. One good canoe, one expert guide, one spare bedroom, can always be found to accommodate two men, whereas a larger number would be at a loss.

6. *Assuming that this year's trip will*  
(continued on page 95)

ILLUSTRATIONS  
BY ELLISON HOOVER



Take a week-end outing in advance and try out every piece of equipment you're planning to use



Don't take too large a party. It's much harder to recruit the first pair than the next dozen



## MAKE YOUR LUCK

(continued from page 35)

be just like last year's. A repeat location is no insurance against change, no matter what success was had last season on the same grounds. Weather, a dry summer, outlaw hunting, infiltration of wolves, and a hundred other factors may change the picture completely. A season ago we were fighting insect pests in Canada on the same October date that, a few years back, a heavy freeze iced in a friend so solidly that he was able to walk out over the ice and send a dog team back for the outfit. One year deer or moose may be shot from a canoe, the next they must be hunted on land.

Just as common is the tendency to take equipment and methods suitable for a given area into new country with different conditions. I once spent a week in the Sierra Madre of Mexico with a doctor who had brought his complete Adirondack hunting outfit—except the snowshoes. It was a thoroughly thought-out collection of equipment, and thoroughly out of place.

7. *Failure to adjust to adversity.* On every trip circumstances arise which (at least by the time they are confronted) are unavoidable. The trip failures in my journal would be increased many times except for cases when someone in the party suggested a way to overcome misfortune.

A case in point was a duck shoot on the lower Colorado River. My partner and I made elaborate plans, even constructing a special boat of shallow draft, but we timed our trip to coincide with the normal arrival time of the ducks. That year things were different, and we were able to shoot only eight ducks the entire trip, which was not many for those days. Instead of accepting defeat, my partner rigged up some makeshift fishing equipment. When we had all the fish we could eat, we investigated the adjoining bottoms for game. Before many hours had passed, we were enjoying some of the finest quail shooting imaginable.

8. *Too little time actually devoted to sport.* Any camper, myself included, will deny the accusation that he does not make the best use of his time outdoors. Yet the fact remains that at least 99 percent of us do not. If you will actually time yourself on your next trip and see how little time is left for fishing or hunting after the grub is cooked, the dishes washed, the canoe patched, the sagging tent repitched, the firewood gathered, and other camp chores completed—to say nothing of time spent moving camp or traveling to and from the good fishing or hunting country—you will be surprised. You can cut down on many of the essential tasks and eliminate many nonessentials.

Eating is a tremendous thief of time. Except for the evening meal, I have resolved to put all eating strictly on a subsistence level. One year, when traveling the same canoe route with several Indian families, we discovered that they were out with their canoes before sunup, whereas our own party seldom broke camp until two hours later. Be-

cause their women and children slowed them down, the Indians were always overtaken by our party later in the day, only to pass us the next morning.

We discovered that the Indians baked their bannock the night before, breakfasting quickly on cold bannock and tea. From then on we cooked breakfast the night before, allotting no more than ten minutes to eating in the morning. We eliminated the noon meal except for what we could carry in our pockets, and from then on we never saw the Indian party again.

A man with a flair for cooking can spend the whole day humoring his stomach. Morning pancakes are the worst offenders possible. Cooking pancakes to fill half a dozen hungry men will occupy half the morning.

9. *Weather.* When we encounter the weather man, we admit he is the luck factor over whom we have the least control. Erratic weather may mean as much as three weeks' seasonal difference from year to year. For spring bear hunts during the sucker run, which varies widely in time of season, my brother has a man on the ground wire him when the run starts, and three days later they're having well-timed hunting.

This policy is sound also on waterfowl hunting, as even famous shooting skies may be wingless unless the weather is right. If a man's vacation is inflexibly fixed to a certain time, he should plan a type of hunting relatively immune to fickle weather. We can't control weather, but we can make allowances for it and refuse to put all our eggs in the weather basket.

On rereading the foregoing, I am aware that many points overlap. For example, excessive camp moving, that killer of precious days, is almost always the result of another error—not arriving soon enough to prospect the country and find where camp should have been located in the first place. Similarly, relying on inaccurate information or going into new country without experienced guidance usually results in the old routine of moving camp.

### Be Ready for a Good Break

These observations tend to show we are all inclined to put too much emphasis on the word "luck." To be sure, there is only one explanation for the surprised hunter who shoots his buck while going to the spring for water, but we must remember that he had his gun with him—a fact which was not luck but preparedness.

Close inspection of our experiences shows that we have a lot more control over luck than we think. Lady Luck is not fickle; rather, she is often helpful, but it is risky to jilt her outright by being unprepared. I could have cried "bad luck" when I missed some good goose shooting because of that malfunctioning outboard motor, but two hours of use on a lake near my home before the trip north would have revealed the trouble. Bad luck? No. Sheer negligence.

Nine times out of ten, we make our own luck. If it's bad, we'd best look to ourselves if we want to change it for the better next time.

THE END



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